



The
Burning
Gauze.



LENORE CROUDACE.

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July 26th, 1922.



The Burning Gauze

and other

Poems

by

LENORE CROUDACE

San Francisco



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
LOVE'S DEDICATION, <i>Lyric</i>	5
THE BURNING GAUZE, <i>Blank Verse Drama</i>	8
THE DRAGON-FLY, <i>Lyric</i>	75
THE ENDLESS QUESTION, <i>Blank Verse Drama</i>	78
UNCONSECRATED LOVE, <i>Lyric</i>	144
THE RUSE SUBLIME, <i>Blank Verse Drama</i>	149
THE HILLS OF ENNUI, <i>Blank Verse Drama</i>	160
SOULS OF DERISION, <i>Blank Verse Drama</i>	172
MY SOUL IN SHIPS, <i>Lyric</i>	186
THE TRIDENT OF LOVE, <i>Blank Verse Drama</i>	190
ABSENT AND FAITHLESS, <i>Blank Verse Monologue</i>	209
THE BROKEN SPELL, <i>Lyric</i>	214
DISGUISE, <i>Lyric</i>	217
THE LEES OF LIFE, <i>Lyric</i>	221
TRANSITION, <i>Lyric</i>	224
THE SEA CLAIMS ITS OWN, <i>Lyric</i>	228
THE VIBRATION, <i>Lyric</i>	231

Loves' Dedication

Deceit, you say, is void of all defense,
I am not what you thought, then love is dead,
Its greatest hurt, the hedges of pretense,
Where wistaria vines the ugly bushes thread.

Oh, let me plead before you curl your lip
In scorn for one who never learned to fly,
With lustrous pinions that through ether dip
To brush the lashes of your waiting eye.

Just pause and ask your deepest truth's own soul,
If love is just the rare escape you search
From what is base to that transcendent goal
Whose trust divine no blackened lie can smirch.

To meet your nimble fancy's upward lift,
I robed myself with priceless ancient lace,
A borrowed mantle from the mighty drift
Of heroic plays and chivalry's old grace.

My burning skin beneath its precious cloak,
Was shrivelled with a consciousness of shame;
A thief condemned, I listened for the stroke
Of doom,—your opened eyes to pierce and blame.

So fond, so foolish, deserving of your hate,—
Oh, can't you see just there a straining love,
A spiral fairer than a column straight,
A blackbird gentler than the silvery dove?

Like a suffering brute in need of human speech,
Like ivy climbing up an unbroken wall,
Or child that strives the ocean waves to reach
And hold, I knew myself in hopeless thrall.

I dreamed till dreaming was a pain like flame,
The love I won from you was nobly won,
And guilty thoughts could not my longing tame,
Or make my fervor of a cooler sun.

And now you strip me of my actor's dress,
Not porcelain but common clay revealed,
You dare not spurn me more than priests who bless
A corpse whose soul they must to Heaven yield.

I loved you in the face of coming scorn,
The mask I wore was tribute to your height,
And self-abasing, by torment bled and torn,—
I yet defy you to degrade my plight.

A tear? Rejected, but not, thank God, despised.
Pretense, perhaps, was worth the after-pain,
In all the ashes of the sham I prized,
There is one ember yet I can retain?

Ah! Yes! You'll find in all the waste of years,
In faded letter-leaves and books long-read,
One phrase of love whose very guilt endears,—
My created role remains when I am dead.

Good-bye! though trampled all your love in grime,
Like strings of pearls concealed in filthy rags,
Remember, some one cares through endless time,
A prisoner of his sin, whose heart-beat flags.

The Burning Gauze

A Drama

Characters:

GWYNETH, Lady Llanberis;	JANSEN, a Barbarian;
OLAF, Earl Llanberis;	LORD FRELON;
FRANCOEUR, Castle Chaplain;	MAURISA, a Barbarian woman;
DARKAINE, a Barbarian;	RHODA, Lady Crabtree;

Master of the Horse at Dinwiddie,
Courtiers, Servants, Barbarians, etc.

Act 1. Chapel of the Castle of Dinwiddie at dawn.

FRANCOEUR: How pallid sickly faint the dawnlight gleams!
As if the sun half feared to show his face,
And, advancing with a timid northern glide,
Shook off the splendor of his daily birth,
His mantle of a tropic burnished gold
Now hid beneath a cold, white winter robe.
His beams so pale scarce serve to light the dust,
Whose ashy film is spread on every arch,
And lines the angle of each crevice groove;
Why the cobweb lace across this Gothic dome,
Secure against the touch of quick or dead,

Possession holds of its lofty home in air,
With mien more haughty than the stones below.
Perhaps the spider in his dainty mesh
Knows quite as much as our dense human kind,
Could tell us if we understood his tongue,
Why the sunlight is so dim, its rays so cold.
Or is it that the chariots of the morn',
Which bring fresh hope to every living thing,
Avoid this charnel-house of knights long dead?
These tombs have power to freeze my trembling bones.
Somehow I long for warmth, for ease, for life,
And yet I came thus early here to pray.
I should not question the meaning of the sun,
Or ask for warmth that might corruption hold.
I should pray to be a soul quite free from soil,
Exempt from tarnish in the inner thought,
As in outward guise a priest with reverent eyes.
This end attained, then is there no beyond,
But must I just remain at that fixed point,
A drop of human purity distilled
For use within this precious castle's walls?
A thing for my lord and lady to look upon,
When statues pall upon their sated eyes,
And painting lacks the stimulus they crave;
An example for their weakened, softening wills
When pleasures of the flesh, refined, allure.

Again I falter from perfection's top,—
I should not seem to doubt their noble poise,
Or fancy that temptation lives for them.
Sweet Lady Gwyneth, proud, exalted, true,
Has never trembled on her ideal height,
Or phrased in inmost thought the devil's name.
For Earl Olaf, perhaps I could not say the same,—
He seems to drift upon a current's breast,
And lulled and soothed by a silvery, murmuring tide,
To sleep in a gracious rest unknown to me.
Oh! how temptation presses every point —
I condemn my lord from a throb of jealous pain!
If Gwyneth were free, and I her equal, — oh stop!
That such a vicious thought should pierce my brain,
When I am here at dawn for holy thought!
Why I am but the first of her courtly suite,
The servant of her mind and soul, the rail
She holds as she climbs the attic spiral slim
Towards the topmost tower of this castle front.
The men in armor clad, with guns and spears,
Protect her less than I, all cloaked in white,
Enamelled with a virtue stainless, cold.
Yet while I pray to hold my post so pure,
A shiver trembles in my heart's deep crypt.
Perfection would be not to think at all;
For as I think, there crawls the thought of sin,—

The morning light has frostier grown, withdrawn
From its first promise of a rising sun.
This chapel is so old, it breathes forth death,
A tomb of many tombs combined, it seems
Less redolent of life than the catacombs.
What spirit walks in ghostly white, — I dream !

(Enter Lady Gwyneth Llanberis.)

Ah ! A thousand pardons at your feet.
I supposed my lady you were a ghost afoot.

GWYNETH: Oh Francoeur, I am so glad you are here.
I am trembling yet from a horrid dream last night.
I seemed to be in some strange, foreign place,
Far, far away from home and every friend.
I stood alone on a ledge one inch in width,
While yawned a rocky chasm below my feet,
So many miles I could not see the end.
Then hot upon my path a monster chased,
And roared above my head in frightful lust.
The sky in crimson flamed as if in rage
That such a ghastly sight could be revealed.
I woke with almost death-damp on my brow,
And sought this refuge from the nightmare grim.
It is said in learned books that dreams come true,
That they are the presage of a coming fate,
That if our thoughts are pure, our dreams are sweet.

But I, Francoeur, am conscious of no sin,
Unless,—unless,—I can scarcely name the thought.—

FRANCOEUR: I feel too weak myself to give advice.
But since you have been so sore distressed, speak out.
Best give to vagueness something like a name,
And then it will go. A shadow frightens more
Than a fact, however large. We run from vice,
While a vicious hint receives a welcome warm.

GWYNETH: You speak my thought, Francoeur, your heart is wise.
There is a sense that grows and grows on me,
As if I stood on a sliding, slippery plane;
As if my husband, you and all our friends,
But risked our lives upon a sea of glass.
I look upon our wide expanse of park,
Our battlements of stone and steel and brick,
And they seem to be a picture of the clouds.
They shimmer on my gaze like rainbow beams,
As if a fairy raised a dazzling wand
To bring them to our sight. And then they go!
They seem to melt like the thin diamond frost
That rims at dawn the petals of a rose,
To dissolve as the morning sun triumphant rides,
Towards the glory of the middle day. I came
To seek within this sacred calm, a hold
I could not find elsewhere. For surely here,
The marble nave is cold and firm and still.

Against the chancel rail of polished brass,
I can lean and never fear it will break down.
Against your heart drilled in the ways of prayer,
A true repose will greet my quivering soul.
A church is like a perfect chrysolite,
So strong, a thousand troubled waters' roll,
Cannot disturb its peace; nor wind nor sun
Make any change of its rest on the earth's dear breast.

FRANCOEUR: If this dim chapel, old and cold and grim,
Can protect you from a painful thought's advance,
Stay here alone, my lady, seek your rest.
I will withdraw.

GWYNETH: No, no, Francoeur, remain.
At this strange hour of an uncertain dawn,
I fear to be alone; I need your aid,—
Teach me how to pray, and read for me
The presentiment that fumbles in my dreams.
Is a gift of happiness like mine a sin?

FRANCOEUR: You put too great a burden on my head.
Can your servant bear so rich a strain of joy?
That you, gem-crowned with every living grace,
A woman so much more than womankind
You seem an ancient goddess sent from flame,
To mark for men an Elysian shining stretch
Amid their waste, would stoop to hear his prayer!

GWYNETH: You play the courtier suave; I want the priest!

FRANCOEUR: You force me then to bare my own strange heart,—
Like you by impious thoughts I am beset;
Like you I tremble at shadows in my brain.
Black smoke, deep charged with particles of coal,
So small they seem but vapor's dusky veil, —
The devil's breath is around us everywhere.
Like you, I sought this chastened spot at dawn,
To escape a horror creeping in my brain.

GWYNETH: Francoeur! the ground is slipping from my feet,—
If you can fail me in this hour of need,
Then what are castle walls and moats and guns,
To save us from invading fiends?

FRANCOEUR: No fear!

Your soldier guard is useless and antique;
We fight no more with arms and knives and hate,
But with our conscience and that imp you know,
The intrusion of a guilty dream at dawn,
Into the curtained chamber of our thought;
Where all should be as in your palace halls,
The voice of music, sweet as Memnon's song;
And beauty that spells itself in every deed,
There creeps the grisly spectre of a wrong.

GWYNETH: A wrong? Francoeur! What wrong?

FRANCOEUR: I do not know!

GWYNETH: I am so cold! The dawn is chill as death!
You take from me the most precious hold in life!
This sanctuary now but seems a tomb—
Like other things, it slips from out my grasp.
And you, Francoeur, are less than what I hoped.
If holiness can stumble in the dark,
Then how can blindness walk with fearless tread?
Francoeur, farewell, I hope I dream no more!

(Exit Gwyneth.)

FRANCOEUR: Dear Lady, throned so high on purple heights,
An old enchantment seems to wrap her round,
As if she were a queen of mystic lore,
Compelled to sleep and dream a thousand years,
Imprisoned in a palace tower high,
While nations rise and fall and come to doom,
And religion's face, just one to her long trance,
Is as changing in its forms as the painted sky.
A nameless fear of evil chokes her heart.
What if, dear cloistered saint, she walked abroad,
Amid the hideous multitudes of crime,
Or where the poor in squalid alleys crowd,
Would not the sight quite kill her as she looked?
What if, released from bondage in this cage
Of grandeur, ancient as the walls of Rome,
This stronghold of the feudal pride and might,

She and I should meet as human souls?
Perhaps upon a field of waving wheat,
Whose golden yellow changes but to green
Against the everlasting roll of hill
Towards festive skies in a blue horizon line:
Would she be so cold, so strange, a wraith asleep?
Or if we strayed per-chance to a battlefield,
Whose dark and miry soil still reeked of blood,
Although but carrion crows the story marked,
Would she see in me the priest or touch the man?
Could we see each other blanching face to face,
And pull from their hiding-place of mould and thorn,
The soul within us by convention iced,
And crusted with that fearful thing called Form?
Perhaps I find the symbol of her dream,
The monster who persued her through her abyss,—
It was this fearful shape of God or man,
The lines of this stately, cruel, antique pile.
It is crushing her and crushing me, oh God!
I seem to hate these arches' lowering gloom.
I long to run and run against the wind,
To an end perhaps I could never hope to reach.
Oh, for the wide and open plain of sand,
The frolicking ozone that unconfined
By castle walls or shrines of crumbling tombs,
Invites the soul and heart to dare to be!

To dare to sin, perhaps, how weak am I!
Ashamed to have one natural human thought,
So frightened of the curving of my brain!
Why! how time has flown, the day is light,
The sun glows as if it were already noon!
The rays are brilliant as a torrid fire,—
They pierce the dimness of our dusty glass.
I must face the glorious light of coming morn',
Look from this imprisoned height to the land below.

(Climbs to a view from a high window and looks out.)

FRANCOEUR: Why no, the sun is pale and wan, a shroud
Of pearly fog has shut him in the clouds.
There is a fire blazing in the mead,—
Perhaps the soldiers play at mimic war,
Or there is an Autumn cleansing of the fields.
And yet I should have heard such plans outlined.
How bold the flames advance like billow tide!
They look as if they would devour our fort,—
But nay, we cannot burn. There is no siege
We could not stand. Oh, onward let them roll,
Dinwiddie could not fall,—no more than she,
The Lady Gwyneth, preisetss in a dream!

My mind is wandering like an atom free
From its affinity. There is no fear
Of Form or Flame or Love or evil thought,—
And yet how high the frenzied fire leaps!

CURTAIN,

Act. 2. Morning salon in the castle of Dinwiddie. Earl Olaf and
Countess Gwyneth discovered, he reading, she at the piano.

OLAF: Gwyneth, you never played with finer touch!
But for your birth you might storm the world for fame.
In every phrase, there is the spirit's sheen,
A finer thrill than ever I have heard
Before from your fingers' run upon the keys.

GWYNETH: You are so subtle, rare, my Olaf dear,
Your soul vibrates in perfect tune with mine!
We are so strangely one in all our thoughts,
Sometimes I think we should live apart awhile,
Just to see if alone we could live at all!
We do not know the thought of solitude,—
How could we married in our infancy!
Why I called the name of Olaf first of all,
Before that of my parents or my nurse.
They would not teach me even to coquet,
But just to be a wife for once and all!
Sometimes I think,—now, Olaf, you agree,—
It cramps one's mind to be so one, so lone;

For people of a fickle brain are free
To wander far in gardens of the sense,
And soul, and to pluck odd flowers of the mind.

OLAF: You find it dull forever in this place?
My cousin, Prince Rupert, has given me the choice
Of his estates for a month or two of change.

GWYNETH: From castle hall to castle hall we go;
And never once escape from our own rules!

OLAF: You would not go among the horrid crowd,
And breathe the poison of their common ways?
You could not choose a friend of lower birth!
Dear heart, you know you are a flower grown
By every art and artifice, refined,
To be unlike the tangled human weeds;
To give its beauty and its perfume rare,
But in an atmosphere so purified,
It can bear no presence but one almost as rare.
You are so tender, I fear you droop a bit;
I will have fresh artists from the court for you,
Or comedians to while away a languid hour.

GWYNETH: Olaf, my love, you are so good to me!
What is there I can want but you, just you?
It is all too sweet, too rich, a hot-house life.
I seem to glide on some enchanted stream,
In a tropic forest dense with many palms.
The lilies floating with our lazy boat

Seem laden with an incense like a drug.
We glide and glide and glide we know not where:
There is no end in sight,—that is the fear!
No end, but just the softness of our lives.

OLAF: And you would have it otherwise, my sweet?

GWYNETH: Perhaps we should work to help the suffering poor?

OLAF: You mean the cattle in the fields below?

Ungrateful, they would resist your very pains.
They love you more enthroned in distant state,
Than if, in futile hope, you stooped to them.
Come play to me once more that song of love,
You say a Hungarian gypsy wrote for you.

GWYNETH: A gypsy with a soul of Heaven's hue!
An artist born in poverty and grime,
Who fought his way until he reached a throne,
And compelled the royal ears to hear his song,
The song that from his myriad depths of woe,
Burst through his breaking heart with art supreme.
I cannot play it with the thrill it needs,
I, who all my life, have lived in ease,
And scarcely suffered even from a doubt.
It never once has crossed my married heart
That you could ever be but love to me.

OLAF: Nor have I ever dimly thought or dreamed,
No matter how you rave of gypsy songs,
That you could ever be but wife to me.

Play on, dear heart, my own.

(Gwyneth takes her seat at the piano. Enter Lady Rhoda Crabtree and Lord Frelon.)

RHODA: Do we intrude?

GWYNETH: Oh no, we kissed away an idle hour —
Come in and talk of music,—join the cult.

RHODA: Where is your handsome chaplain, Francoeur the good?
Two look so lonely, but three make perfect art.

GWYNETH: Francoeur was in the chapel at dawn to-day,
And no doubt remains prepared for morning prayer.

RHODA: Your vigils then begin also at dawn?

GWYNETH: Last night, I could not sleep and sought repose,
Beneath the vaults we consecrate to God.

RHODA: And confessed your trouble to the curious priest?

OLAF: What confession could there be in a soul of snow?

FRELON: Nought but the subtle mingling of the mind,
Which is so sweet to priests with hearts adrift
From human ties; and to women grown too dull,
In the embrace of love assured and legalized.

OLAF: I think your tone is somewhat odd, my lord,
Unless you generalise. What sport have you?

FRELON: What sport? I want to shoot some hounds of men!
I think this fire has come from their foul hands.

GWYNETH: This fire? What fire?

RHODA: You have not seen the flames?
The entire valley beneath your guarded moat

Has burnt like gauze to a lighted candle's touch.
They say a barn by accident caught fire,
But Lord Frelon thinks some strangers worked the deed.

FRELON: They are mammoths from the other side of the globe,
Who visit here with wealth untold and threats
Of very evil stripe. I fear their hold
Upon the weakened wills of our humble poor.
But tempt a beggar with a piece of gold
And he takes us all to a hell built high with bribes.

OLAF: What matters if a fool or two succumb?

RHODA: They have food and roof and know no other want.
Lord Frelon's mind is full of dreams of war,—
To know him is to live on quarrel's fence.
To match his sharpened arrow's ruthless throw,
I hurl the javelins of tongue two-edged,
At the defenceless squire who calls me wife.
My son knows torment when he meets my gaze,
And my sister wishes me in foreign lands.
Believe his word,—you will become a fox,
Trained to hide from thirsty, bellowing hounds.
And, so wary of the foe's approach,
Your first regard becomes a myopic stare.

GWYNETH: As if a million pounds or two of gold,
Owned by men just free from tropic wilds,
Could work a harm to strongholds built in stone!

FRELON: I am a target for any diatribe
You wish to throw; yet I speak but fearful truth.
The world is far too old to hate the poor—
The poor so reckless from ancestral wrong,
They care not what they do or where they go.
You think because, like soapy ocean foam,
They lave the feet of your proud castle walls,
They never dream of other joy or pant
Beneath an envy eating to their core.
What if, as in the ancient fairy tale,
They were shown a way to reverse their humble state;
Suppose one tempted them to build with gold
A fortress far out-vying this old pile;
Suppose the ogre breathed a sweet revenge,
Just murmured they might win the prince's sphere,
While lords whose ermine now trails marble halls,
Would fill the place of serfs and till the soil?
Would not that thought in jewelled spangles hang
Concealed beneath their coats of homespun wool,
Until its burning radiance craved for light,
And jumped to outer air free from disguise?

GWYNETH: You make me shiver with a thousand frights.
What could they do?

FRELON: Why leave us here entrenched
With provisions running low and outer aid
Cut off.

RHODA: Oh Frelon, make your gloom complete,—
Don't draw the line at a simple fruitless siege,—
Suppose they grew so rich they took the walls,
And tore us screaming from our last defense.

OLAF: You talk like romancers in the Arabian nights;
Or old maids who suffer from a nervous brain.
My Gwyneth, play once more your soothing air,
Frelon, we must seek for you a warmer mood.
You grow too crabbed with those books of yours,
And no fair wife to grace your dinner-hour.

FRELON: You think my temper would run in smoother grooves,
With one like Lady Rhoda for my bride?
She boasts herself the huntress' savage taste,
And wields a rapier with as neat a thrust
As mine.

RHODA: At bay, dear friend? Why mine the type?
'Take Gwyneth, with her soft religious glow,
You have more mind and rank than her Francoeur,
And might, with daily teaching, and fond art,
Learn his noiseless tread with pious feet.

FRELON: That old, out-worn and sickly subject still,
Poor souls that cannot delve to deeper thought,
Must ever prate of marriage or its lack!
I tell you an incendiary has burnt the fields
Beneath the castle gate; that threatening men,
With power of untold wealth and untaught hearts,

Have pitched their tents within our very midst,
And menace the peace of all our village life;
And you answer me with silly idle jests
About my bachelor estate! Deaf, deaf!
Your ears so filled with luscious, sensuous sound,
You cannot hear the thunder of the sky,
Or rumble of a million cannon wheels.
A peasant, servile, doffs his hat to you,
And you think he loves the ground you walk upon,—
Unable to read the gnarl upon his brow;
Or the curse that quivers on his compressed lips.
Nor can you see the key of solid gold
That hangs suspended o'er your dizzy heads,
As if it would unlock the gates of Hell,
Or lock you all in loathsome dragon jaws.

GWYNETH: Lord Frelon, I almost think that you are mad!

(Enter Francoeur.)

FRANCOEUR: Pardon me, if I intrude this hour;
The fire had gained such head I was alarmed.
The guard fought back the flames with all their skill;
And had for aid some strangers from the town.
These men have worked so hard, I asked them in.
They are foreign to Dinwiddie's ancient land,
And it seemed but courtesy to show them through.
Perhaps Lord Olaf, you would meet them here?

OLAF: You can not mean those ruffians in lucre decked?
Or ask I should receive them as my guests?

RHODA: Why not? We then can prove Lord Frelon's word,
See if his imagination has run to black,
So that he shrieks at a few poor simpletons.

GWYNETH: Olaf, please, let Francoeur bring them here.
Some presentiment hovers through my thought to-day,
Like mammoth blackbird fluttering towards a swoop.
Perhaps Lord Frelon speaks a vital truth,
When he hints at danger from the crowd below.

OLAF: Lady Gwyneth is not well, I fear.
A thousand clowns if they gratify her whim!
Francoeur, we will see your friends.

(Exit Francoeur.)

RHODA: We commence a plot!
These horrid fiends in your choicest morning-room!
Will you shake hands? Shall I?

GWYNETH: Oh yes, pretend
They are the same as we, discern no flaw
In their behavior or their churlish speech.

FRELON: Their entrance here has come with rapid stride,—
Last week they never dreamed to see you close,—
They will exclaim at Lady Gwyneth's charm,—
Dear Lady, wear a veil to hide your face.
In ancient India, they guarded thus
Their women from barbarian leering eyes.

GWYNETH: In ancient India? Oh, now you rave!
Dinwiddie is so modern and so fair,
With all of civilization's perfect gloss,
And I am mistress in my home!

OLAF: My sweet!

(Enter Francoeur with Darkaine and Jansen.)

FRANCOEUR: My friends, you meet Lord and Lady Llanberis,
Lord Frelon and Lady Crabtee,—guests.
Darkaine and Jansen come from foreign lands.

DARKAINE: We find this place well worth our lingering stay.
There is nothing just like this across the sea.
Indeed your house with all these trimmings here
Has more than caught my eye. To you so old,
It is new to me as gold just from the earth,
So shy, yet bright when you wash the sand away,
And sparkling with secrets of things as yet unbought,
And power of a new unfathomed mine.
Your outer turrets long have chained my thought.
They draw me as a magnet to their height;
Already from gazing on their spiky front
They seem to be my own.

GWYNETH: They say that all
We truly love is ours in inmost soul;
That never star in boundless space alone,
So distant shone from our poor mortal sight,
That some faint radiance did not grace our eyes,

Give us a beam of light's transcendent blaze.
So if our castle truly gives you joy,
Just as you look to love, it gains your soul.

DARKAINE: Don't think I would make claim for a single glance,
Without the thought of buying what I take.
My lord, I am richer than your whole estate,
Even if by a telescope of wondrous size,
It were enlarged a hundred thousand times!
But it is odd and old and wins my taste,
I will buy it as it stands at your own price.

OLAF: Can't be I hear aright what you would say?
You—want—to—take—Dinwiddie—from its lord,—
And think that all the gold that mother earth
Has ever from primeval times belched forth,
To taint with abysmal subterranean fire
The craven race of stupid, common men,
Could buy from me my ancestral castle halls?
Go forth! this instant leave my sacred hearth,
And never dare to show your face again
Within a mile from here!

DARKAINE: *This* is your court,
Where manners are like aromatic steam,
And velvet not good enough for tired feet!
If I had begged a crumb from your servants' board,
It would have been tossed to me with regal air.
I might even have supped within your sacred halls,

And left replenished, satisfied and glad!
But unashamed, I frankly enter here,
No favor asking from your lily hand,
But simply making bargain for old lace.
I will give you coin enough to build a realm,
In exchange for this ancient mass of rotting stone,
Encrusted with the centuries' moss and dust,
And cold from dampening clay of many dead.
You shriek and send me forth like a vagabond.
Why surely in this mansion of old fame,
You should have a tradesman's sense of honest gain!

FRANCOEUR: I fear, Darkaine, you do not understand,
How dear to every throbbing nerve and sense,
Is the feudal stronghold to its ancestral lord.

RHODA: The man is so absurd he amuses me!
He wants Dinwiddie as a child the moon,—
I remember as a fretful, restless girl,
I wondered why I could not buy a crown,
And thought a coronet by far too small
To grace the tangle of my auburn hair.

FRELON: Lord Olaf, the man is strange and weird, no doubt,
But do not let your anger rise too soon.
Of course no pope could buy Dinwiddie's lands,
Much less a man like our comrade from the wild.
But sign a truce, make friends,—the future, drop,—

JANSEN: Suppose we came with armies at our heels,
Instead of thus equipped with words of peace,—
Why then with sword and sword, and gun and gun,
We would stand alert to meet an ugly thrust.
We come instead with ingots of pure gold,
Why you should rush to greet us as we come!

GWYNETH: You find it odd we have no love of Gold?

OLAF: *No Love* of Gold? Why I despise it so,—
I would sink it all to ocean's deepest slime,
And think no dungeon black enough for him,
Who fancied he could buy one foot of soil
That clusters round the walls of my ancient seat.
Francoeur, like all religious men, you err,
In thinking cattle such as these should come
Within the precincts of a courtly smile.

(To Darkaine.)

Once more, I command you leave this place at once,
And never dare again to show your face
Within a thousand miles of my retreat!
Take back your money to the barbaric wilds,
And build yourself a monster palace there,
With gems and brass and gorgeous golden dross;—
Leave me alone with priceless relics' trust.

DARKAINE: I see our fault was that we were too mild.
Next time we will come with different step and voice.
Farewell, proud lord, when next our swords are crossed,

We shall see which one falls sprawling to the ground.
I vow some day Dinwiddie's court shall be mine,
And you a suppliant begging at my feet!

(Exit Darkaine and Jansen.)

CURTAIN.

Act 3. (A meadow outside the lands of Dinwiddie. Sunset passing into twilight. Lady Gwyneth, picking a few wild flowers and musing.)

GWYNETH: With what balm the twilight falls upon the nerves!
Nothing too sharp or tense or forced or gay;
But lilac incense clouds that softly fade
Into a silver pale as downy white,
Yet transparent, faint, like a winding veil of film,
So many times enwrapped it is almost thick,
As if it changed its nature to hide a truth,
Arcana sublime too rare for human eyes.
Can it be that nature love is tearing me
From worship in our chapel gloom or that
I grow so much to love my solitude,
Deep with the random fancies of my thought,
Whose zephyrs are on my soul like a caress,
That I cannot love my Olaf as I did?
I am like a skipping sprite from northern snows,
So absorbed in tiny arabesques of air
That cut a crystal scene athwart my gaze,

So deeply cradled in reverie's silken mesh,
That the deep warm love of human hearts escapes!
Perhaps if I had a child,—but that may come!
Or if Olaf would roam with my soul abroad,
And play,—just play,—into my varied moods;
But his love so deep and fixed through all our lives,
Would never play at being but itself;
Why he would think me weird to be here alone,
Without a maid or groom to follow me,
When he could see me from his study height,
So near I am to Dinwiddie's dear old walls.
Just here the grass is new and sweet and young;
Its roots as soft as an infant's tender flesh!
The primroses grow in clumps as if afraid
To stand alone! While over there all burnt
And brown, the meadow shows the sweep of flame
That Frelon thought would reach our guarded moat.
Absurd to look for wrong where none exists,—
To find an evil motive everywhere,
And never give a chance to accident!
I feel like a milkmaid on an evening stroll,
Her work all done, and just a moment's chance
For some rare thought or hope, and a deep, sweet breath,
From beauty's idol in the setting sun.
So reckless in his color painting here,
Against the fields and slopes of castle green,

Ah! there he sinks behind the northern arch
Of Dinwiddie's entrance gates, the last red ray
Aflame like a ruby set in polished steel.
There is a sudden chill of cold and night;
The milkmaid must leave her moment's holiday.
I thought I heard a rustling in the grass;
They say that in a solitude intense,
Every sense becomes so sharpened. keen,
No subtlest ether wave escapes unfelt.
Perhaps I hear that mystery called growth
That stirs the tender buds of heather green.
Oh! no! it seems the tread of a knight in mail,
Who crunches with his iron hoof and spur,
The succulent roots of flower and sprouting grass.
One of our men from Dinwiddie come for me,
Dear Olaf fears to see me here alone.
How quickly the curtain of the night descends,
And how cold his winds against the pale young moon!

(Enter Darkaine from behind her.)

Why who are you to come behind my back,
Like an evil ghost who walks on an open grave?

DARKAINE: I met you at the castle a few weeks since;
Admired the beauty of your golden hair,
The boundless depths of your splendid purple eyes.
I had no chance to talk with you as I wished,—
Your lord so quickly turned me from his gates.

GWYNETH: You cannot blame him that he took offense.
Your offer seemed to him a monstrous crime,
An insolence he could not understand,
And therefore could not pardon at your hand.
I would have taken a somewhat milder course,
Would have talked and argued our different point of view.

DARKAINE: I thought as much,—your face is sweet and kind,
Dear Lady, you know the wealth that I command,—
There are many thrones that I could call my own,—
If I but tossed the gold their stomachs crave,—
But now they have slipped past my worst desire;
And all the longing of my virile heart
But turns to love of you.

GWYNETH: What can you mean!

DARKAINE: Just what I say; and nothing stands between
My wish and me. I have come for you this hour.

GWYNETH: Why ruffian, madman, leave my side at once!
Or the castle guards will kill you where you stand.

DARKAINE: Oh no; they sleep in fancied dreams of peace,
And in this modern time but idly prance
Like toys that move to the winding of a key.
They cannot see you in the falling dark,—
Ten steps from here my men await my prize,
And in the offing of the harbor bar,
A ship awaits to bear you o'er the seas.
Every man in all the country round,

And every sailor who mans the bark I own,
Has fallen at the bribe of unfailing gold.
You are mine this instant, and for all time to come!

(He seizes her and before she can even shriek, gags her mouth
and puts a chloroform handkerchief over her face.

He then picks her up and hurries off the stage.)

(Enter Lord Olaf.)

OLAF: I thought I saw my Gwyneth walking here,
Her form so sylph-like in its floating white,
Stooped up and down in the young meadow-grass.
She is so wayward in these latter days,
Still young and innocent as a little girl,
Just creeping timidly to a woman's hope.
I am sure if beneath her snowy breast there throbbed,
The hope of an heir to Dinwiddie's rolling lands,
This strange caprice of hers would ebb to nought,
And all her being would go out in pride,
And love that blooms like a perfect flower kissed
By April rain of gold and silver mixed
As the sun peeps out of the dewy face of spring.
Where can she be? The land is barren, cold,
And no one in view for seeming miles around.
Can there be another fire in the town below?
A nervous chill has seized me through and through,—
Whose step is that?

(Enter Lord Frelon.)

FRELON: Lord Olaf, you alone?

OLAF: Frelon, is that you, my friend, it is so dark,
I scarce can see your face,—you seem most pale.

FRELON: I am so pale I dare not show my face.

OLAF: Is that a fire down below? Again!

FRELON: Yes, that and worse than I dare name to-night.

OLAF: What do you fear?

FRELON: My friend, the horror comes,
I could not name outloud the thing I fear!

CURTAIN,

Act. 4. (Home of Darkaine in Barania. An immense room, very
bare, except for red plush hangings and gold columns.

Windows in the rear. Maurisa and Gwyneth
discovered.)

MAURISA: Dear Lady, I hate to see you seem so sad.
There is nothing you crave you may not have;
Darkaine would go for you to the foul fiend's lair,
And braving every dragon and all beasts,
Would search hell's inmost caves to please your whim.

GWYNETH: Maurisa, stop! You know you must offend
In pleading Darkaine's cause to ears so sealed
With contempt of all the wrong he aims to do,
It seems they never knew the thing called Sound,
And were but symbols of their ancient use.
I know Darkaine would give me everything

But that sweet blessed Freedom which I crave,—
Withholding that, his other gifts are vain.

MAURISA: No vainer than your fight against the bars
Of gold that lock you fast within his home.
The lion captive in a circus cage
Does not disdain his food. Then why should you?

GWYNETH: Your questions idle, useless and as vain
As surf that beats against the rocky land
With hope to win it to the enfolding wave,
But strengthen the purpose growing in my will.

MAURISA: To take your life? Sweet lady, don't, I pray.

GWYNETH: No, Maurisa, do not fear that end.
I am not the sinking coward suicide
Who would take the easy way to block the foe,
And give a head bowed low by earthly pain
To the Reaper, who smiles, when with facile knife,
He cuts those mortals who with stems too weak,
Break of their own accord and lean to him.
While yet I can I will fight my haughty host,
And although he stood to me opposed,
In all the wealth of earth and nether-earth,
Still he could not by one tiny jot
O'ercome the barrier of my resisting mind.

MAURISA: But Lady, he may not always thus forbear
To take you to his couch and pollute your flesh.

GWYNETH: I know his forbearance has been already long;
I expect that any moment he will come
To make a savage raid upon my sex.
But though he pinioned me by force of arms,
And did barbarian violence to my frame,
He could not make me less Lord Olaf's wife;
He could not win one instant's weak consent,
Or change the purpose of my constant heart.

MAURISA: You talk like one most young in sexual art,—
Why don't you know that to resist like that,
But invites in men a passion dense with pain?

GWYNETH: My husband never used that ugly word,
But gave me through our comradeship of days,
A love so touched with spirit essence rare,
It seemed the soft descent of an angel's wing,
The human love that God has made divine,
Or the love divine that takes the way
Of human hearts and hopes, as in the clouds,
So close to earth with warm and heavy rain,
One sometimes sees the palisades of snow,
Where throng the immortals bending towards our pain.
Why often as I look upon this tower
Of prison life, I seem to see outlined,
In whitened silhouette of the summer sky,
My own Dinwiddie far across the seas.

MAURISA: You wander far from the thought of every day.

Darkaine might torture you or make your death
So slow and fearful, long-delayed and sharp,
You would beckon towards a completing suicide.
Best yield and rest this frenzy of your mind.

GWYNETH: Do not think that murder blurs my eyes,
Or tempts me to forget my marriage vow.
Abduction is itself a murder foul,
From which the final act but follows on
As a burial follows upon a death,
Or as midnight follows eleven's stroke.
If he should kill me, then the play is done.
If not, however tortured, mangled, torn,
Reduced to prostitution and the whip,
Or held in slavery, like an African
Released from wilds of savage sloth and grime,
I bathe his feet and lick his hand for food;
I still will pray to see Dinwiddie's stones,
And clasp my Olaf once again in life.
Maurisa, you have obeyed enough to-day,
Applied the goad to rend my inner heart,
Used all your wit to serve your master's end,—
Now go!

MAURISA: You know that you must change your mind!

(Exit Maurisa.)

GWYNETH: Let me think once more of that strange dream I had.
They say that sickly odors from the marsh,

Where the Amazon winds in equatorial slime,
O'er where the lazy Nile o'erflows its banks,
Blow on the trade-winds to our very doors,
And poison men ten thousand miles away,
From the sources whence their effluvia first grew.
One reached me in Dinwiddie's perfect peace,
From this barbarian camp of wrong and gold.
And then that awful sense of slipping feet,
Of sliding down a hill of brittle ice
Or sinking in a glacial quicksand marsh;
But now I stand within the canyon's gloom,
And the monster of my dreams is at my heels,
Relentless, sleepless in his deadly chase,
I seem so wrought of iron pinioned down
By clamps of steel to adamantine rock,
I forget the old sensation of a fall.
I seem to make my Odyssey of pain
On gossamer from friendly breezes blown
A feather floating on a stormy wave,
Secure because so buoyant, light and frail,
While giant ships go down to fearful death.
At Dinwiddie they laughed because I thought too much,
And called my reveries the fantastic flight
Of a mind that turned too much upon itself.
Why now I could fall upon my prayerful knees
With invocation to the light of brain!

A head is such a little thing to have
Against an army and a world of gold,
And poisonous claws of a frenzied, lustful beast,—
Yet still its fibre can defy their blows.
Where was I just before Maurisa came,—
Oh yes! I tried to will away this place,
And see myself at home, at rest, in love,
With Olaf's arms, about, around me.
Why there he is! He smiles, he calls.—

(Enter Darkaine.)

DARKAINE: Who calls?

GWYNETH: Can't you see I wish to be alone?

DARKAINE: I did not bring you here to be alone.
I brought you here to bear me noble sons.
I like the shimmering floss of your regal hair,
Your eyes so blue they glow like purple rage
Of sunbeams sinking back on violet hills.
I like your flesh so soft and warm and sweet,
One could crush one's heart into its velvet down,
And never feel the pain. I treat you well,—
You are doomed to yield. Why wait a moment more?

GWYNETH: It then is true, I please your sense so much,
You would degrade me to the basest use,
Make me your mistress as I cannot be your wife,
Force me to bear you sons without a name?

DARKAINE: Oh no! My wealth would build a royal line,
A dynasty that shall spring from you and me.
I will buy Lord Olaf off, a quick divorce,
And I make you mine before the law and church.

GWYNETH: I do not grant divorce can ever be,
Between two hearts whose marriage of the soul
And sense and flesh has been a life-time joy,—
And though you wrought an impossibility,
And made me mother of your bastard sons,
They yet would bear Lord Olaf's noble stamp,
And owe to him the only fatherhood
Their mother owned for them.

DARKAINE: Don't anger me,
With mocking satire of a defiant tongue;
You know that I could kill you where you stand?

GWYNETH: Then do! Release me from this ugly strife,—
Set free my soul to wing to its desire,
To poise in substance of the upper air
Above Dinwiddie's devastated height,
And from out the empyrean blue,
To waft to Olaf an immortal's kiss.
Bury deep this body that you crave,
Remain a stupid chief who thwarts himself.

DARKAINE: Accursed be your devilled woman's wit,—
At least you will find I can force you to my bed.

GWYNETH: You can by violence and by drugs, of course,
But never with my conscious mind as aid.
Darkaine, you boast! I vow that though there intervene
A miracle to save me free from shame,
In this black land where everything is shame,
And gold that pollutes the very name of man,
You shall not win your way or make me bend
By one ten millionth fraction of an inch
To your desire. Now leave me to my thoughts!

DARKAINE: I leave you till you have a prettier mood,—
But magic time and money play for me.

(Exit Darkaine.)

GWYNETH: My voice rings hollow in my own vain ears,
A tiny butterfly that beats her gauze
Of shining wings against the frowning rocks
Of cliffs uplifted from a seething surf
To sterner rocks beyond. I must be doomed.
Relentless Time that faster grows than thought,
Will work with gold and all his black intent,
To break me to his purpose in this hell,
Where there is no whisper of a friendly voice,
But just my memories and dreams and prayers.
Can such a cobweb stretch across the void,
To friends perhaps as lone and dead as I?
To think! To act! To run! Why Who is there?

(Enter Jansen.)

JANSEN: Fair Lady, Darkaine sent me here to say,
Your horse awaits you in the yard below.
The men ride out to-day to hunt the bear,
And buffalo that roams in angry herds
Upon the plains. He says you like the sport.

GWYNETH: Jansen, I can never learn to hunt and kill,
You think that I rejoice when blood is spilled,
I who would spare the life of the smallest bird?

JANSEN: But yet you ride, my lady dear?

GWYNETH: I ride
Because I cannot sleep; and hope the wind
Fast blowing on my fevered cheek and brow,
Will bring the rest I seem no more to know.
Oh Jansen, it seems so strange I once could sleep,
Could sink to sweet oblivion through the night;
For now although I close my eyes and doze,
One-half my brain is still alive, alert;—
Greet armies seems to march about my bed,—
I shriek and seize the knife at my right hand,
Prepared to kill a foe who taller grows
The more I feel his absence in the night!

JANSEN: Dear Lady, I wish that I could be your dog,—
For just one glance from your sweet beaming eye,
I would take the place of that horrid knife of yours,
And let you dream of Dinwiddie's castle halls.

GWYNETH: Jansen. Just look for once within my face.
You find it very fair?

JANSEN: Like Heaven itself.

GWYNETH: My Jansen, brave and bold, tell me the truth,
If you stood upon your final hour of life.
Which would you choose, a moment's view of Heaven,
Or all the wealth that Darkaine's coffers hold?

JANSEN: Why I was taught that Heaven must be supreme!

GWYNETH: Your comrades have a faith like yours?

JANSEN: Not all.

They think that Heaven is rather far away,—
While gold is very near.

GWYNETH: But I am near.

Listen and do not think I am profane.
If in my soul one ray of Heaven gleams,
If you can find my beauty like a psalm,
A promise of something you have never known,—
Of a radiant life sublime that waits for us,
Beyond this mire we call a mortal life,
Then let it be to you in place of gold.
Bring your comrades, let them hear the tale,
I will teach them as men were never taught
Before in all the stretch of savage time.
They shall look upon my face until its film
Has grown upon their own; some day they'll find
Their children wear my image blue and white,

While mid the tangle of the baby curls,
Will glow a gleaming thread from my thick hair.
Perhaps within their brains a light will dance;
Reflected from the light that glows in mine
And all I know of truth and love divine
Will ripple through their veins to distant time.

JANSEN: My Lady, I scarcely follow you.

GWYNETH: Not yet,
Jansen, I must take a ship and sail for home.

JANSEN: There is no ship that Darkaine does not own;
The crew like you are prisoners to his will.

GWYNETH: But if I kiss you all to hashish dreams
Of embroidered ecstasy on fields of flowers,
Have you dine on heliotrope and myrth,
And soothe your ears with flute and violin;
If you learn to drink but wine ineffable,
And if with me yeu go on an argosy
In search of joy far richer than the stones
Whose myriad brilliancy has made the fane
Of heathen gods, then will you come with me?

JANSEN: You would let a dog like me press your sweet lips?

GWYNETH: Oh, Jansen, no,—you do not understand.
Let me kiss you while you just leave me free.
Oh Jansen, if you could but know my love
For my dear lord so far from this wild place,—

My Olaf whose wife was stolen from his arms,
You would help me back,—you would gladly take my price.

JANSEN: You give us music and the right to look
Upon you with all the heart and mind we have?
What must we do?

GWYNETH: Why hide me in a ship!

(Enter Darkaine.)

DARKAINE: How strangely festive glow my lady's eyes,
As if amorous tremblings shook her woman's core!
She resists my wooing with a will of steel,
Unmoved as diamonds in a bath of heat;—
And gives her fondness to a foolish slave.
Jansen, you go and comb my horses down.

(Exit Jansen.)

Gwyneth, I have news you will be loath to hear.

GWYNETH: You frown as though you meant to murder me,—
One instant holding me within your grasp,
To give the blow a stronger, truer aim.
You have a message from across the sea?

DARKAINE: The order I gave my men has pushed its fins
Into completion sooner than I thought.
Dinwiddie's pride is now a mouldering heap
Of ruin like a funeral pyre of old,
Where the corpse that burns with many oils,
And offerings of great sacrifice, creates

An ash-heap thick with perfumed essences
Of things that nobly went to noble death.

GWYNETH: I see you torture me with cunning art,—
Ingenious and infernal in your pains
To make me dread the worst. Lord Olaf lives?

DARKAINE: Why can you think my love for you so slight
I hesitate to cast aside the man
Whose very shadow blurs out all my hope?

(Gwyneth puts her hand on her heart and shrieks.)

DARKAINE: Every follower he had is rich,
The helpless hireling of my boundless wealth,—
And he, a coward in a silken leash.
Surrendered, wept and gave himself to death,
At the very first advance of riches' wrath.

GWYNETH: You lie! He lives! I feel it in my heart.
You use this ruse to force me to your arms!

DARKAINE: You poorly judge the depth of my deep hate,
If you think I could bear to see him live!
I am rich enough to buy a world, and more,
If more there is to buy. I want a throne,
And princes of my blood to bear my name.
I want them with that luscious flesh of yours,
And with eyes whose azure mirrors yours, my queen.
My son and yours to rule a newer world,
With all the baseness of the old stamped out,

The weakness drowned in one great sea of strength,
The beauty fastened in a mould of gold!

GWYNETH: My Olaf dead! Dinwiddie low in dust!

Oh now I stand upon that awful slide
Of ice like glass that slips with running oil,
Of sand that seems to ride upon the wind,
Upon a substance lacking weight and depth!
All I loved is sinking from my grasp,—
I had a home, a husband, and a God,—
And now but filmy air surrounds my sense.
I heard a voice through whose ecstatic thrill,
There ran a call to duty in the flame.
It tinkled like a tiny bell at night
When rose-leaves beat against their petals' cheek,
And send their dissonance upon the breeze;
I felt it throb the day you broke our doors,
And it shouted in the grass I plucked that day
You stole me from my meadow twilight walk.
Oh now I still can cling to Light Divine.

DARKAINE: You mean that you will take your life before
You yield to the splendid fate I hold for you?

GWYNETH: A whisper in the caverns of my soul,
From out the dusty corners where I prayed
In childhood, bids me fear the thought of death,
As blacker than the blackest sin of earth.
Through all the Fairyland of my proud youth.—

DARKAINE: All this just means that you at last consent
To be my wife.

GWYNETH: Your wife in *Law*, no more.
I hold you for the vilest thing on earth,
And I the victim punished for old joys,
Destined by fate to fight you hand to hand,
And put upon your wickedness the stroke
That will annihilate and kill your kind.

DARKAINE: You still may speak with bombast for your pride,—
But Darkaine wins for bride a lady famed
For beauty, birth and virtue unexcelled
In the noblest, fairest land of all the world.

GWYNETH: Bold Darkaine wins for bride a sword of light,
A woman ill with death of her own heart,—
But living with a holy fire that flames
With light as pure yet strong as that which laves
The morning sky When Aurora breaks the clouds
And pours her rich effulgence on the land!
Oh my Olaf, sweetheart, husband, my love!
If I could but come to you across the brink
Of this poor life so cursed with leering gold,
And meet you in the purple mists of death!
But no! I fight for you and all like you
Who die upon the barbarian's block and axe!

DARKAINE: Prepare to meet me here to-morrow morn',—
And take the bridal vow before a priest.

(Exit Darkaine.)

GWYNETH: What sound is that beneath the window-ledge?

(Goes to the window and looks out.)

Why Jansen mounts his horse and waves to me!
Oh can it be he fights upon my side?
He smiles! He waves! He points to crowds beyond.
Somewhere far out at sea a ship sets sail,—
And it is all too late for me, for love!
Dinwiddie lives no more but in my dreams—
A thousand kisses for a thousand men,
To bathe within my beauty's rich expense,
Would only buy my journey to a grave!

(She sinks upon the window-ledge with a sob.)

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CURTAIN.

Act 5. (Scene: Lord Olaf's study in upper round tower of
Dinwiddie Castle, facing on the court yard. Lord Olaf
ill in a reclining chair. Francoeur by his side.)

FRANCOEUR: So heavily drag on the sluggish days,
It seems that since the pale and tired dawn
Awoke us from a slumber we did not have,
The weary ages have ambled past our view.

OLAF: Francoeur, don't let your fancy leap like that,
If you wish to see me stay one hour sane.
The hammers beating in my frenzied brain,
Sound out the tocsin of a madman's end.
I can't believe they took her from my arms,
Just as her modesty like violet's bloom
Began to spread its incense on my heart,
And send through all my pulsing frame the hope,
Of an heir whose life to beauty should unfold,
From out the perfect chalice of her love.
Fraucoeur, in ancient lore, they speak of knights,
Who died because some maiden was too fair;—
Oh what is death and all the pangs it brings,
To this live torture of a soul denied
A sight or word from the goddess he adores?
My friend, invoke the magic of your kind,
Tell me if she lives or dies with him?

FRANCOEUR: My Lord, I have no magic but that of prayer.
There is scarce a moment in the days gone by,
I have not given to pleading on my knees,
To a Heaven all pitiful and just, for her
We love, whose virgin heart could know no wrong.

OLAF: If I could trust her modest innocence
Was gauge of safety before a God all just,
Once more I could stand upon my feet a man.

But Christians suffer for each other's sins.
I have been haughty, scorned the poor, you know,
And thrust foul Darkaine from my threshold's warmth,
When perhaps I should have shown to him
The hand of courtesy; and Gwyneth and I,
So grown upon one stem from childhood's seed,
Must feel alike the spring and winter frost;
And though a hundred oceans roll between
Our bodies' place, together we must swing
Towards all the splendor of baronial fame,
Won by the actions of a noble will;
Or downward in a mire of stagnant slime
For some old sin that lurks in one of us.

FRANCOEUR: Your brain is ill with superstitious dread;
I wish that you would eat, and turn your thoughts
Towards some quick plan of action bold.

OLAF: Refrain!
You talk to a prisoner more bound and chained
Than the basest murderer who awaits the axe.
No foulest dungeon of the feudal time,
Enclosed a wretch more pinioned down than I,
Although they leave me Earl Llanberis still,
With a castle, two friends, and a slender retinue.

(Enter Frelon.)

Why here is Frelon now! What news? What news?

FRELON: I have questioned every man who walks the fields
And docks, but bring you little hope from them.
They are in dumbness so combined and sealed,
It seems that golden chains have tied their lips.
The pirate's ship has reached its destined port
In some far land whose name they will not tell;
And though we owned a navy large as theirs,
We still should have to search the waves and worlds
For Darkaine's hiding-place. As it is our ships
Are manned by men who linger neath his spell
Of all-compelling wealth. I almost fear
The corruption reaches to our own few men,
Who, gathered in the court-yard gloom beneath,
Seem ready for some grim and fearful deed.
There is a heavy rumbling in their talk
As if a thunder-cloud with anger big,
Loomed black and ominous upon our path.

OLAF: Frelon, they would not dare to be so base,
Not while I live with one faint breath of life!

(Goes to the window; throws it open and looks in the
court-yard below.)

My men, I see you gathered there below,
As if you sorrowed for the grief I bear.
And yet my brain distraught by cruel wrongs,
Must be assured that you are loyal still.

Every man of you is honor's own,
And thinks no gold the bowels of the earth
Can yield, is equal to a woman's fame.
Your countess was as pure as dew-drop's sheen
That diamonds all the heath at morning's blush.
She was stolen by a ruffian, savage beast,
And languishes we know not where, in pain.
The sailors, who know her hiding-place, have lied,
Have lied like curs or snakes that crawl the marsh,
Because their skins were oiled with wealth's foul taint.
Come, do you fight and starve and die with me,
And help to find my matchless, peerless pearl,
Or do you join the hungry hounds of shame?

VOICES FROM THE COURT-YARD: We fight for you unto the end!
We fight!

OLAF: Then forward go each man of honor brave,
And torture every whelp that walks the strand,
From him wring the secret he would hide,
Of where the pirate makes a putrid camp;
Or kill him with the bribe between his teeth!

VOICES: We go! We go!

OLAF (staggering): Oh God! Although they kill
A million men it will not bring her back!
Or save her from a fate I cannot think
So painful is its image in my mind.

FRANCOER: A moment since, I seemed to hear her voice,—
It spoke within my brain, and rippled there
Like waves that tremble, curve and dimpling glide,
From vibrations lost in far-off mountain heights.
It said with all her old, sweet, noble grace,
“I will not die.”

OLAF: Say that again, Francoeur. I will try to live;
Do you see her as she used to stand
At the head of our stairs when royal guests were due?
More regal in her winsome charm than they,
Yet simple as a little girl at play,
Who threads a sunbeam in her braids of hair,
And wreathes her neck with a chain of buttercups.
I used to grudge her very finger-tips,
To knights who thronged about her diaphanous gown
Of silvery, snowy lace. I thought her wit
A bit too keen against your lance, Frelon,
And Francoeur seemed too saintly to be her friend
While now,—

(He buries his face in his hands and sobs.)

(Enter the master of horse.)

GROOM: My lord, have you ordered us to die?

OLAF: You fool, I ordered you to torture, kill!

GROOM: The men opposed to us are ten to one;
We go to certain death if we try to fight;

And though our love for you exceeds all else,
What end is gained in dying at their hands?

OLAF: Just now you shouted from below you would go!

GROOM: But when outside the gates we met the guard
Who watch us night and day with menace vile,
They spoke of governments and banks and ships,—
And said a countess' fame but lightly weighed
In scales where kingdom's wealth the balance drops.
They laughed to see us proud, with hearts for you,
And pointed to the fatness of their men,
So rolled and wrapped in wool and olive oil,
Their path is greased and sweet. You think they care
For one fair woman tossed to pollution's bed,
When the other way lies comfort for a host?
Though one were crucified, a million saved,
Will turn them pitiless against your prayer.

(Olaf starts from his seat and seizing a brass candelabra, hits
the groom on the head with it.)

OLAF: Coward! Vile hireling of a master cursed!
You think with sophistry like this to heal
The wound that breaks right through a husband's heart?
You dare to say you are afraid to die!
Then I will play the part you cannot take,—
Will help you to an early grave, then go

Myself to where no longer torn by view
Of human infamy, my bones can rest.

(He moves to strike the groom again, but is restrained by
Francoeur and Frelon, who hold him back, while
the groom sinks unconscious to the ground.)

FRANCOEUR: My lord, be calm a little while and hope.
Don't spend your force before you know the truth,—
It cannot be that all the world is crime.
There still is sweetness in the air of Spring;
And Heaven's dome is still a perfect blue,—
The sun its myriad diamond fires lights,
For those whose soaring souls are free enough
To look above the brown and sordid earth.
Can these things be and only men be base?
Some hearts beat true in all the awful void.
And Lady Gwyneth, here, or in the clouds
Still loves you with a truth not death itself
Could change! My lord!

(Olaf has had a spasm and lies gasping in Francoeur's arms.)

FRELON: The cut has gone too deep!

CURTAIN.

Act 6. (Barania. Evening. Gwyneth in a boudoir at an open
window alone.)

GWYNETH: Oh in the trembling swirl of giddy things,
When Church and State like tottering pillars fall;
No flaming sword against a pallid sky

Proclaims for feeble men the path of right,
Can I be sure decision had the aim
Of light that strikes at morn the horizon line
In the perfect angle that our eyes descry?
Was my choice right in wedding where I hate?
But yet who else could tame this monstrous beast?
My eyes for him have supernatural beams,—
He threatens death, yet listens like a snake
Who is but fond to the charmers' practised spell.
Dinwiddie down, and Olaf dead, dear heart,
What could I do but bear this burden's weight,
Accept like Hercules a task immense.
How wild to fancy Jansen would consent,
As if my beauty had a price alone,
Without the gift of sex. For Olaf, yes,—
My soul, the ecstasy of my spirit's lift,
Was precious as a nectar drop distilled
From Heaven's own founts. But these wild brutes
Are satisfied with naught but yielding flesh,
This flesh of mine so silken, soft and pure
From centuries of tempered, holy life,
Darkaine, my husband since this morning's deed,
Gloats upon the thought of what he owns,
His eyes like coals of hateful fire gleam;
Delirium rages in his stupid head,
To see my breast and neck so pearly white.

His horrid fingers have not reached me yet,
There is time to end his life or end my own,
How piercing, brilliant and how clear the night!
The space that separates the upper stars,
Seems thin and faint as if a thought might pierce
From world to world and take no time to pass.
Could Olaf's soul come to me in the air?
The lustre of the night upon the hills
Is like the shining veil an angel wears.
I seem to swing between the earth and sky,
Unable to fix my heart upon a thought.
What noise is that? Some spy is lurking here.
Maurisa or perhaps Darkaine attacks,
Unwilling I should have the solitude,
I begged for this last night,

(Enter Jansen.)

JANSEN: My lady, soft.

GWYNETH: Jansen! Don't say that you have come for me?
I could not stand the sudden ecstasy.

JANSEN: I run a fearful risk in coming here,
But I have thought until my poor brain ached.
We have no right to keep you shut up here
While your husband thinks perhaps that you are dead.

GWYNETH: Thinks! Thinks! Poor Olaf is beyond all thought,
Murdered long ago by Darkaine's men.

JANSEN: Darkaine told you so?

GWYNETH: I was convinced;
I knew he would not hesitate to kill;
He wished to force me to become his wife.

JANSEN: The sailors say Dinwiddie still is safe.
And your husband waits and pines at home for you.

GWYNETH: Jansen, turn and look me in the eye.
My reason whirls within this stifling place.
Perhaps you plan another snare for me?
Oh what it would be to trust one human man,
To know he would not, could not lie to you !

JANSEN: You said you would bring us all a glimpse of Heaven;
Darkaine's men at home are not the rich;
He pays the enemy with tons of gold,
And thinks that we are held by bond of race,
To do his will like oxen in the field.
But we are keen as he for pleasure's swing.
His love for you is mixed with lustful sex,
So that he cannot look into your eye
Without the famished wish to kill, while we—

GWYNETH: You read him well, his murderous will, his rage
That ever darkling burns behind his brows;
Day by day and hour by hour I stand
Face to face with violent death from him,
And yet I live and parry every thrust.
I fear to hazard death while there remains
To me, one single, flimsy chance of life.

I fear, also, the risk with your men at sea.
You are sure they will accept the terms I give?

JANSEN: You said you would your bounteous blessings pour
Upon the babies of our race, would throw
About their infant life, your light and soul,
And make them beautiful and fair as you.

GWYNETH: Every gift I have I will give to them!

JANSEN: And when you reach the other shore, your home,
You will not forget the humble friends you bought?

GWYNETH: You shall be guests within my castle halls,
Upborne and ravished by music all your days.

JANSEN: You said that you would kiss each man of us,
If we left your body free to your own lord?

GWYNETH: Yes, yes, now take this pledge I keep my word.
(Bends forward and kisses him.)

JANSEN: How sweet the perfume of your royal lips!
I have sometimes thought the moon a heavenly sight,
As in silver majesty she sailed the sky,
And I have prayed to her on my midnight watch,
But you are fairer than she dares to be,
Even when the crescent of her youth
Hangs low and pale against the twilight hills.
We must worship idol, god or perfect man,—
Suppose we worship you instead, divine?

GWYNETH: You shower me with praise I cannot bear;
But I will try to be what mortal can,

Will describe for you an arc of stainless white,
And save you from damnation underground.
Will save you for a view of love sublime,
Where we adore not moon or human kind,
But the Eternal Truth that lives in stars and sun!

JANSEN: There is no time to lose,—put on your cloak.
I have a horse below,—we ride like fire,
And reach the coast before the break of day!
The ship is ready for the outward plunge,—
She will put to sea as the sunrise bursts the sky.

GWYNETH: Now swear to me by every hope you prize,
In life to come, by every throb that sends
The red blood coursing through your veins to life,
You would not play me false or fool with death.

JANSEN: My Lady, Darkaine struck me once a blow
That cut in rags the flesh across my breast.
See here the scar all red and angry glows,
(Bares his chest.)

By this I swear to take you back all safe
To the fairyland you call Dinwiddie fort.

GWYNETH: We ride like Lucifer to find a shrine!
(Exit Gwyneth and Jansen.)

CURTAIN,

Act. 7. (Scene: Bedroom of Lord Olaf in Dinwiddie Castle.

Midnight. Lord Olaf in bed very ill; Lady Rhoda, Francoeur and Frelon by his side. Lights turned low.)

RHODA: Midnight! And I alone with three sad men!
My husband and son at home as sad as you!
But convention is a strange inconsequence,
Beside the deepening misery of our state:
Lord Olaf seems at rest. He sleeps? Or worse?

FRANCOEUR: As yet it is only sleep that keeps him still.
Although I would rather see him rage and weep
And beat his broken nerves in delirious strain,
Than lie unconscious with no will or voice.

FRELON: You hated me when I presaged coming gloom.
And swathed in music's futile luxury
The herald of the revolution's storm.
And now the emphatic worst has thrust its heel
Right through your airy structure built of gauze,
Like the fine chiffon of a bridal gown,
You would stay to see the tatters torn again!
Poor Olaf cannot live, then let him die!

FRANCOEUR: Wounded rats, within an iron cage,
We are helpless, hopeless, but not yet quite dead.
There is perhaps the millionth of a chance
Some help will come from friends in distant lands.
Though enemies of race, they yet are one
With us against the vandal's furious pace.

Lady Gwyneth, like us, is within a jail,
But let us trust in miracles to be.
She yet may save us all,—let Olaf live!

OLAF (awakening and springing from his bed):
Take me, take me from this haunted room!
A thousand ghosts are hovering in the beams.
There are so many dead they want our souls,
And grudge us our few years of human pain.
How many died within this house, this room!
There dying breath has carved an arabesque
Upon the walls and rafters thick with gasps.
Read it! Translate the hieroglyphics there!
What do they say? "Why we are more than you!
Our hosts combined could conquer all who live,
Although they weighed the world in solid gold."
That's it! That's it! The dead are on our side!
See them wave their grisly arms of grey!
Yes! Yes! My friends! I come! We will have revenge!

RHODA: I cannot bear to hear him rave like that!

FRANCOEUR: Lord Olaf, we do not need to invoke the dead;
We have some hope of friends who search the seas
For Darkaine's hiding-place and your dear wife.

OLAF: Don't taunt me with idle talk like that,
You know quite well that I am going to die,
And try to ease my torture with a hope!
They give a wounded soldier a little ice

To cut the burning of his fevered throat,
And you give me a morsel made of lies.
Don't! Don't! Let me go to them for help.
The clustered spirits of the imperial dead!
Do you hear that rumbling in the outer halls?
They will kill me before I have a chance to die.
Bar the door.

(There is a sound of a footstep and Frelon goes to the door
and opens it.)

FRELON: Who walks the hall so late?

A VOICE IN THE DISTANCE: One who has the greatest right
in here.

OLAF: I thought I heard a woman's voice,—oh God!

(Enter Gwyneth, rushing past Frelon, throwing off her
coat, and going to Olaf's side.)

GWYNETH: Olaf, my love; it is I,—Gwyneth, it is I!

OLAF: Gwyneth! The delirium of a dying man,
Or the first rapt vision on the eyes of one
Already dead?

GWYNETH: The marriage of one who lives.
Listen, dear, to a wayward fairy tale,—
A princess stolen from her lord, and borne
By blackguards to barbarian lands of hate,
Beset, goaded, tortured for her love,
And told that she was widowed and betrayed;
Then married to the monster potentate

Whose gold surrounded her like teeth of flame,—
At last by sheer intensity of love,
Is home once more, immune from touch of beast,
Forever in heart and mind and sense combined
The changeless wife!

FRANCOEUR: Praise God, praise God for that!

RHODA: What miracle made him set you free?

FRELON: You mean
What arts did Lady Gwyneth use on him.

OLAF: My ears are ringing with a joy so sharp
It seems to be a cannon shout of pain.
Dear love, I tried in vain to pierce to you.
With traitors steeped in bribes on every side,
Men too low to have an honor thrill,
In infamy so deeply dyed, their shame,
Hung all Dinwiddie's walls in drooping crepe,
I knew I made a useless fight with fate,
And so you see me sinking to my tomb.

GWYNETH: Oh no! it cannot be! Revive! Look up!
Don't give your heart to death so soon. I know
That men are foul and base and all for sale,—
Not all,—while still you live for Honor's flag.
That thought beset me in the murder wilds,
I looked at Death as at Mephisto's grin.

I thought how all the world in Stygian slime
Would run, if none upraised the oriflamme
Of loyal love,—if none should make the reach
Towards white cloud castles shining in the skies;
If none should raise a voice of impassioned psalm,
In the vast desert wastes of silent souls!
And that winged thought it was that helped me home,—
I bribed the sailors and our prison guards,
But not with gold, for that was all Darkaine's;
I showed them myriad riches of the mind
And tried to cast for them the spell we know,
When Music throbs its rapture rare, when art
Throws wide its doors to the regal entrance-hall
To dominions we dare to breathe are highest Heaven.
I sang for them, enchanted them with grace,
As if I were a siren or odalisque,
Who is trained to make Egyptian vipers coil
In all the abandonment of magic's hold.
And so I reached you once again, dear heart,
You will, you must, live on, live on with me,
To play the glorious game until they learn
To be as brave as we, to love the truth,
And things seraphic that the spirit sees,
Far more than gold or gems or worlds of land.

OLAF: You said you *married* that horrid beast out there?

GWYNETH: He told me you were dead; I saw no way
But death to free me from a harlot's task.
A marriage seemed the sole resource between
Two sins that loomed with equal blackness on
My frenzied sight. One day I bore his name,
Then found the miracle I had not hoped,—
That I could sway his soldiers to my will.

OLAF: I am so weak beside a heart like yours,
It frightens me to see the gulf between.
Though one in heart and soul and perfect love,
I am to you in *will* a little child.
My courage limps so far behind your own,—
I am ashamed to find myself so frail!
You are too late, my Gwyneth, too late for me,
Already the hosts of death make me their own.
I go to make with them the long, long fight,
To join the rest, who weak, like me, in will,
Yet had the strength for love supreme, divine;
With them I shall wander hovering o'er the earth,
Yet trying ever to rise to serener heights.
You will come to me there, I know, for you
Are here with me to-night, across a world
All seamed and battle-scarred with brutal sin.
You are here once more, my love, and I must go.

Just hold my hand and look with all your depth
Of soul in eyes that only speak of soul,
Into my own. Then as my spirit flies
From this blank couch of earth, an essence rare
From out the perfume of your faithful heart,
Will cling and sweep with me the death-winds' shore.

GWYNETH: Olaf! Don't hurt me with the words too late!
My friends, come here and help me call him back.

(Frelon, Francoeur and Rhoda advance to the bed.)

OLAF: Good friends! They meant to do their best all through,
But they could not bring you back to me or win
The human vermin from their slothful shame.

Gwyneth! (He starts up and flings one arm around her, pointing
upward with the other.) Look there! A group of angel flies
Above our heads! They look like you, so white,
So fond and pitiful They drop their wings
To enfold me in! Good-bye!

(He sinks exhausted in her arms.)

GWYNETH: Oh no! Not yet!

(She bends upon him with a passionate kiss. Francoeur
advances, looks at Olaf, then tries to pull Gwyneth away.)

FRANCOEUR: My lady, come away, you can do no more.
It is almost morning now and you must rest.

GWYNETH: To think that all my fight for life was vain!
I could not save him though I yearned and prayed,

With all the will he thought so strong in me.

FRELON: He died with perfect faith in life to come.

RHODA: Will something happen yet to save our lives?
You know we are imprisoned here like rats.
The county families move within a field
As small as the courtyard of your monster's jail.

GWYNETH (still holding the corpse of Olaf in her arms):
They killed my lord. They shall have no other life.
I swear to fight them back. What sound is that?

(The first streaks of dawn come in at the windows and there is
a muffled, roaring sound in the courtyard below. Francoeur
throws open the windows and looks out.)

FRANCOEUR: Great God! They follow close upon your heels.
My Lady Gwyneth, their torches flame the moat.
(They all rush to the window.)

GWYNETH: There Darkaine stands, his horrid face aglow
With rage and hate frustated, growing mad.

DARKAINE (seeing her and shouting from below):
You see I lost no time in seeking you.
My ship chased yours like wind across the sea.
You betrayed those hirelings of mine, you witch,
But only for a day. I come for you,
And for this rotting piece of masonry.
Open up your doors and let me in.

GWYNETH: I command that you retreat from here at once!
Retreat! Dinwiddie is mine! I won it back!

DARKAINE: But every man upon your track is bought.

GWYNETH: Too true. I bought a hundred on the ship,
And each one of those will buy a thousand more.
These gates will swing apart for Jansen's friends.
Dinwiddie's halls will glow with light, with light,
Like crystals brought from Hades' burning coals,
Great diamonds whose lustre is only white,
Because they have been through that crucible.
To them and to their children we will give
A music you have never even dreamed;
And all the tiny world you think so small,
Yet which is larger than the matter globe
Of simple sand and stone;—the world of thought
I promise them. What infinity allures
Within that magic realm, you cannot guess.
I will bring them scholars, each a star
So piercing strong it lights a million lives;
They shall have books whose store of buried truth,
Is meaningless until it is read aright
By eyes which glimpse astrology's confines.
For all this gift, I simply ask my life,
Immune from passion's urging at their hands,
The right to remain the wife of my husband dead.

DARKAINE: Earl Olaf then is really dead. I thought
He lived imprisoned behind your castle walls.
Then you are mine,—our marriage bond remains,
And though you talk with all your matchless art,
You are not free. Once more throw wide your doors.

GWYNETH: Lord Olaf's corpse is scarcely cold,—he died
But a moment ere you rushed upon our gates.
He lived that ugly day you hedged me in
And forced a marriage vow from my frozen lips.
Darkaine, the morning sun is rising clear;
Across the distant plains, I see the front
Of Jansen's men, with me here are friends,

(Francoeur, Frelon and Rhoda go to the window with her.)
We dare you to assault our noble walls.
Dinwiddie is mine. Roll back into your gulch
Of gold and mud combined for murder power!

(The sun comes out brilliantly throwing red and gold
lights through the windows.)

FRANCOEUR: How can you dare to push your ugly face
Into a room we consecrate to death?
Lord Olaf passed an hour since to life
Immortal, his spirit now just wings the air
That blows so sweetly with the morning dew.
You need a miracle to repulse your shame,—
You have it here. The angels held their peace;

And did not claim the earl until she came
To hold him in her arms one moment safe,
Before he left Dinwiddie to our grief.

GWYNETH: He saw the angels gather round his bed.
Can you believe, proud ruffian, that saints of Heaven
Would choose that *you* should own this memory hall
So rich with Chivalry's roll of honor fame,
That *you* should hold its woman heir your slave?

DARKAINE: Oh no! I believe at last I am accursed!
Lady Gwyneth Llanberis, you have won.
Until this day I never thought there lived
A woman who could be in deed and heart
As noble as her name. Dinwiddie is yours,
I go back to my gulch of gold and mud.
Farewell! May Heaven ever rest with you!
(There is a sound of retreating footsteps. Gwyneth gives
a prolonged wail as she turns from the window
and faces her friends.)

GWYNETH: It is true that I have won my right at last.
Dinwiddie's defense was in my trembling hands;
And now I call it mine beyond dispute:
But oh, the price of pain I had to pay,
The price I still must give to Jansen's men,
While Olaf's marble face grows blue in death!

(She sinks beside the corpse sobbing. Francoeur, Frelon
and Rhoda lean over her in profound pity.)

FRELON: And we alone can divine the awful price!

CURTAIN.

The Dragon-Fly.

Full Summer lay on all the woods and hills,
Effulgent with a dress too golden, red,
While from her bursting breasts ran snowy rills
Of milk that all the hosts of Nature fed.

But I was only Spring all unprepared
For ripeness in the corn and dropping fruit,
My soul enwrapped in crystal frost just dared
To sound the opening note of joy's soft lute.

The scarabeus in a lonely cave,
Where dampness vies with dark to make a night,
Was no less strange than I to light's broad wave,
The vision of the world's creation bright.

Then shyly love put forth his amber wings,
All brooding like a cloud at sunset's hour,
That weaves its whiteness with the golden strings
The dying orb of day lends from its power.

But I was far too young for love's great shower,
That loomed like nature vast with precious stones;
I ran to seek some humble hidden bower,
Where timid fear in lonely silence moans.

A whizzing softer than an unspoken thought,
Pursued my ears. as fast my footsteps flew,
The twin endearment of the summer wrought
With love that ever rich and richer grew.

I turned to look, and beheld, oh fairy's wand!
A tiny being robed like Cashmere's queen,
In lace a bridal angel might have donned,
Before the alter-piece of Heaven's dim screen.

His dazzling colors so inflamed my sight,
I wondered who the jeweller could be,
Who set a million points of broken light,
His gems the prism of this insect wee.

His long thin body sailed the ether through,
Just cutting swift the sunbeam's gold-gray trail;
My scarcely breathing heart enraptured knew
He spelt a sympathy for my poor wail.

The long hot summer day at last met death,
And as the night soft dropped its mantle dark,
My dragon-fly escaped as zephyr's breath
That a moment waves the calm, new paths to mark.

Fond Nature's lavish hoard sank from my view.
For years my steps the City's pavements trod;
In dreary mazes of the mart, the clue
I lost of Nature, love and Nature's God.

And then one day when long fatigue of years
Had turned to doubt in unavailing pain,
And I leaned against my window pale with tears,
My little gauzy friend sought me again!

This time he sang with all a tenor's thrill,
As if in beauty's magic strain of song,
He could his little heart sob out at will,
And sweetly woo me to forget all wrong.

The arabesques that carved his filmy wings,
Were finer than the pattern starlight gives
Through a trillion miles, to microscopic things,—
An insect's theatre where myriad color lives.

This time he buzzed about my aching head,
I knew him as the antidote to hell,
No pantheist passion, and no anguish dead,
But just God's messenger of the soul to tell!

The Endless Question

A Narrative Dramatic Poem

Characters:

MARCIA FLEURMORE,	LEONARDO DULCI,
BISHOP HELDAN,	JOHN CUSTING,
MRS. HELDAN,	FELICE LINGARD,
PRINCE MAHATAZAMA,	BISHOP VIVALDO,
CAPT. SVEN HEDVIG,	VLADIMIR IVRY,
JUAN DIEGO,	FALMOUTH LANSLOWNE,

AUGUST GOSSE,

1st Officer of the Viking; Hindoo Servant.

Scene: Victoria, B. C. Afternoon. A garden party at the home of Mrs. Heldan.

BISHOP HELDAN (talking to Ivry): You think perhaps our life
out here is waste,

That we should bestow our force to better worth
Than in a village on the outer rim
Of uncut woods and forests yet unroamed,
And but a step below the pathless ice.

IVRY: Oh, for your cloth, a jungle or a marsh,
The glacial altitude of Greenland's peaks,
Or scorching desert sands where Arabs hide,
Are but the field your holiness elects.
For me there is no world but world of sense,
The glitter of a million men at arms,
In full embroidered uniform at court,
With dancing girls ten thousand more to leap
About the jewelled steps of a Persian throne,
And singers in whose softened velvet throats
The tones of joy could thrill the sleep of death,
Are not enough to feast my love of life.

HELDAN: Were you other than my guest to-day,
I would condemn a taste so bold and unabashed,—
But for the occasion, I forbear dispute,
And listen as I would have done, a youth
With learning's quest so strong upon my soul,
I could not deny a hearing to a fiend,
Who begged a chance to make a special plea
And justify his spurs. Why are you here?

IVRY: A little ill from friction of the sense
Sometimes within the press of active life,
The rushing thoughts that tingle every nerve,
Expand the fibre to its bursting point;
And we who most have wished to thrill and live,

Must cease to live from mere excess of life.
Sensation drugged by every art of man,
And tortured fine by films of difference,
Discerning shade from shade and tone from tone,
In all the myriad phases of the soul,
Becomes so exquisite it cannot feel
Without a scream at its own supreme surprise.
As if one drank of absinthe drops at noon,
And champagne sweet and strong throughout the day,
Then brandy as he listened to the roar
The city makes at close of day when men
Diverge from money's frenzied gamble throw,
Into an hour marked for pleasure's own,
When strings pulled tight give way and break like worms,
Then in the exciting hours of night, he quaffed
A bitter draught to find at midnight stroke
Himself a maniac joyous as a king
Who mounts a throne he thought long-lost and sold;
And yet who burns with a million thoughts like flames
Which rush so swiftly through his reeling brain,
They kill each other and him as they dash along.

(Enter Marcia Fleurmore and Falmouth Lansdowne.)

IVRY (regarding Marcia): A handsome girl, — she might adorn
the stage,
Were not her gaze too frank, her step so firm.

HELDAN: A wayward beauty we hope to train to worth.
Just now she treads a fearless, thoughtless path,
And thinks she cannot sin, nor knows that sin
Could ever touch her garments' outmost hem.
Such confidence to me is almost bold.
I do not like the girl,—she offends my taste;
She has no calm, no sweet and tender bonds.

IVRY: There is a noble light within her eye,—
A horse untamed that runs the desert wilds,
To the saddle strange, unriden yet by men,
Might prance like her, with quivering nostril strong,
And neck that plunges, curves, but does not dip.
I will observe her glances proud with scorn.

(Heldan and Ivry draw to one side and appear to be engaged
in conversation, while they are really watching
Falmouth and Marcia.)

FALMOUTH (to Marcia): Gossip I smell like perfume cheaply
made;
Consent to marry me and slander dies.
You are so beautiful I forgive the shrew.
Within my arms in love's encircling folds,
You would so rave at your own fair loveliness,
You would forget to have a cruel tongue.
And all your sharpness would be marriage ease,
An angle softened out into a curve,
A treble voice that learns contralto notes.

MARCIA: Oh cease, I pray you cease,—take back your love.
I hate the word and all that it implies;¹
I want the open field of life, the chase,
The chance to use my brain's intensest stretch,
Without such softness as you name. Alone,
I will plough the thickened field of experience,
Uproot the weeds and cut the under rock.

FALMOUTH: And bring upon you hooting scorn so shrill,
From envious gossips who tear your skirt in shreds,
You will wish yourself in jail or at peace in death.
Why now they say you have a double heart, —
And lean in thoughts towards plural husbands here,
That Gosse and I with humility unknown
Before in the sex created to hold the rule,
Divide between us your regard hard-won.
You can't belie your birth and station dear,
Convention's shelter spreads its eaves for you;—
The tiny spark of scandal dies ere born,
And all the kingdom of my heart is yours.

MARCIA: More than all other sins combined, enhanced,
I most despise the coward, craven part.
You think I fear a paltry bishop's wife,
Or waspish talk of other women's spleen?
Their brains with stupidity are densely clogged,
As if with cotton soaked in stagnant oil,
They neither think nor feel, but babble on

Obedient to some rule a priest prescribed.
I will remain a virgin to prove them wrong,
And though they say I share my heart,—
(Enter Gosse.)

GOSSE: Aflame!

Dear Marcia, why this frowning fury face?
You are observed and few forgive like me.
I love you just because you are so odd,—
I like your spirit,—why I stay out here
Because in London I should lack your eye,—
An eye that haunts me in my restless dreams.
It seems to speak of ages far away,
Of incarnation in every race of man.
You were burnt I think on ancient Egypt's strand,
And died unknown in Grecian marble halls.
Some giant Goth from northern fields of ice,
Gave you the fiery glint of his scarlet hair,
Borrowed in an age of innocence,
From the lustrous rays of the gorgeous midnight sun.

FALMOUTH: Your warmth and mine have equal strength, my
friend.

I will not fight, but let us run a race,—

(Enter Felice Lingard and Mrs. Heldan. Marcia and the
men move aside talking in dumb show.)

FELICE: Oh perhaps they think that we intrude,—
Marcia Fleurmore never likes our sex.

There is soul and lack of soul and little soul,
But who has dared to say there is soul too much?
If a poet inflamed the thoughts of every man,
And every woman breathed with music's throb,
Would any eye be dull or just a glass
Like china beads that please a childish taste,
Or mimic jewels that an actor wears?

MRS. HELDAN: Don't dispute, but come this way for tea.

(They withdraw to the side of the stage. Lansdowne talking
with apparent reluctance to Felice.)

GOSSE (to Marcia): It must be worth some ugly scandal thrusts,
To be like you a woman queening men.
So few there are who are truly loved, and long.
Men force their homage to the stately rich,
And wed where politics its net entwines.
They love for a day a mistress' luscious cheek
And purple lip; in sated Autumn's droop,
They backward look to Spring's alluring smile,
And kiss the blushing cheek of seventeen.
But these are flitting winds that come and go;
Their passing leaves no trace on cynic man,—
A rock that stands the blustering, thundering gale,
Without a change upon its jagged face,
Is scarcely conscious when a little breeze
Has beat against its front a life soon spent,
Or swept into the deeper waves of air.

But you have carved your image on my heart,
Like one who etches on a tablet bronze,
The needle in the acid marking there
Your face, so strong, so sweet, yet bitter too,
With all the waywardness of one not known
Or fathomed to her being's utmost depth.

MARCIA: Your compliments embarrass my poor heart,
It is, I own, a joy to be in power,—
Yet a pain there is in being over-strange.
Too much I see the dangerous lamps of love,—
And for the simple vision of their rays,
Must bear derision, scorn and penance sharp,
As if a sin were marked upon my brow,
Or I had broken some sainted sacrament.
See with what a furtive eye they gaze,
Suspicious of my every glance and word.

(Bishop Heldon, noticing that Marcia is indicating him in
her conversation, advances towards her with Ivry.)

BISHOP HELDAN: Miss Fleurmore, have you met our friend
from France?

Ivry, this is my ward, and Mr. Gosse.

(They exchange greetings.)

IVRY: I am worn and ill from living much at the heart
Of life where every moment is a stab
From art too lovely for our straining sense,
And men too keen of word and eye and fence.

I could rest it seems for ages yet to come,
Upon your tranquil view of curving sky,
Just dipping towards the whitened hills beyond,
So near their icebanks cool the heated heart,
So far they have sweet distance's softened smile.
And you are like their height, untried and free.

MARCIA: I thank you,—free, I hope, but not untried.

(Enter the butler with a letter for Bishop Heldan.)

HELDAN: The bishop's seal, your pardon if I read.

(He turns aside and reads.)

GOSSE: I have heard an ancient Druid hides himself
Within the fastness of Vancouver's hills,—
And with the wisdom of his ninety years,
Dictates the course we younger men pursue.
A demi-god to our untutored minds,
We are the playthings of his august will.
We spin, revolve and fall like billiard-balls,
Which seeming tossed about by sportive chance,
Are directed by a master wrist and stroke.

HELDAN: Vivaldo writes in terms that breathe of war.
I think you all should hear his thunder-call.

(Mrs. Heldan, Gosse, Felice Lingard, Lansdowne and Marcia
gather around the bishop.)

HELDAN (reading): "I learn with indignation mixed with pain,
That rebellion's fangs are at the root of the state,
That colonies once guided like a ship

By stars befriended across a perfect sea,
Now dash themselves in stupid rage and hate,
Against a ruler whose flaccid hands lose hold
Of the twisted strands that drive his toppling craft.
Some one must rise at once to fill his place,
To seize the compass he helpless cannot guide,
To lash each recreant soldier into place;
To conquer with no fear of daily death.
He must smooth the wrinkles of a grisly hate,
Must bind each wound that bleeds and heal each sore:
Though leprosy and pestilence abound,
And fire consume the lashes of his eye,
He must not whimper or retreat or fall,—
But win once more from barbarian chiefs at war,
A power usurped and held against the right.
I have searched the checker-board of church and state
For a hero moulded to my task; in vain.
I must have strength, a will that towers, soars,
A heart so rich with ambition's quenchless wine,
It floods the crumbling banks of humbler hopes.
I hear you have a ward of such a stripe,
A woman, but she may prove a better strain,
For novelty will win where custom fails.
Too strong, too ardent for a daily walk,
Of trivial tasks, so wild she stirs men's hate.
Tell her, I command her youth a sacrifice,

To build afresh the tottering walls of state.
This punishment will grasp her arrogance;
For reward she will have the glory due to one
Who does not fail however steep the climb,
However terrible the encroaching ill.
Tell her from me, she must not, dare not fail,—
If she would not invoke the wrath of God.
Tell Marcia Fleurmore she must fight each man
Who lifts uproarious voice against our peace.

(They all gather about Marcia and cry out in awe.)

ALL: Marcia Fleurmore!▼

HELDAN: My child, you must obey.

MARCIA: I know,—a moment let me think,—I bow
Before the command of our most holy priest,
But how—oh God,—how can I learn to quell
The beating of my stubborn heart, the wish
To lead the life my selfish mind dictates?
The very will he so commends in me,
Is made of self,—my ego crowds upon
The world without from which I take no shape,
Or form or thrill or kiss or restraining word.
I am what I am, and can no other be.
Yet must I learn to forget I ever was,—
Forego the yearning cry we call desire,

And think of others' good and not my own.
And I who cannot yield a single thought,
Must dedicate my youth to selfless work.
I cannot and yet he says I must not fail,
Or Heaven's vengeance will strike me as I fall.
Oh friends have pity on my struggling soul,
Whose vanities like millions of tiny seeds,
That long to spring from their bed in fertile earth
Into tropic forest gardens far and wide,
Must die before their birth, in death ashamed
They ever dared to be when face to face
With duty so august.

(She claps her hands on her bosom and gazes up the sky,
as if unconscious of her listeners.)

MRS. HELDAN: You must calm yourself.

GOSSE: She is not for me although I stooped so low,
I made myself a Turkish wife to her,
And shared with Lansdowne a love she did not give
To him or me! My dazzled brain is struck
With something vast it cannot comprehend,
As if I leapt from grosser common earth
To love an immortal maid, and for the crime,
Were spurned into my dark heart's loneliness.
Her image like a vise of infernal mold,
Tormenting me while her substance I must lack.

LANDSDOWNE: No better fate awaits my cursed self,
You and I, old man, are fated twins
Whom Clotho has joined with one strong ligament,
Whose severing would cause the end of both our lives;
Poor wanderers outcast from the love we crave,
We witness, like country shepherds strolling here,
From some inferior star, Vivaldo's play,
So far beyond our simple way of thought,
Its very magnificence but tires our sense.

HELDAN: We must plan at once the work outlined. She goes
As ambassador to the courts of those
Vivaldo thinks are traitors to his state.

IVRY: Miss Fleurmore, I met you but an hour ago,
But that hour has grown into many years,
Whose palimpsest is their treasure won from pain.
I thought you strange, a woman striking, strong;
I have changed my mind; you are something more than that.
If it is commanded you should die to self,
It has not been said you should be quite alone,
For though you fight in single strife of heart,
A wafted thought, a sympathy not said
May slightly ease the long task's strain.
My life has been for self; I tell the truth,—
It has been a life seamed through with anguish throes.
I am a cushion in which imbedded lie

A million pointed needless lost to view.
Your path cuts mine as diamonds cut soft glass.
If sometimes dead desire from its grave shrieks out,
Remember the suffering can be no worse than mine,
Though all my life was given to fond desire.

MARCIA: I looked just now across the northern sky,
And seemed to see a light effulgent there;—
Perhaps (she turns to him pleadingly) I have been wrong in all
I dreamed.

Yet you I have just met to-day, alone
Have seemed to comprehend. It is so sweet
To find instead of strife a voice that knows.

BISHOP HELDAN: Your order is for strife throughout your youth.

MARCIA: Great God,—oh pardon me, I start for *war*!

CURTAIN.

Act. 2. (At sea on the Pacific Ocean, on board the Viking, Capt.
Sven Hedvig in command. Foredeck of the vessel,
Marcia alone, looking far out to sea.)

MARCIA: How strangely love of self dissolves in mist,
Before the awe sublime of Nature's play,
Like the vista of the horizon line,
Which does not exist but in our minds,
The sea and sky which never, never meet,

Although we seem to see them joined in one.
Is that dark speck a ship that ploughs the waves,
Or just a bit of curling smoke and spray?
Why yes,—a ship the sails seem hung in crepe,
And phantoms pull the ropes and steer her course.
I whirl,—I dream,—and worse than dream, the sky
So circular in the vast expanse above,
Seems to hold me on its concave side.
A moment more and I walk like a wonderful fly,
Upon the zenith blue, my head turned down
And gazing on this miracle of sea,
Whose mazy silver mirror waves beneath.
Down, down until I pierce the deep,
And see the men who died in liquid wealth.
Like me enamored of the universe
So widely flung in medium of fine silk,
The softened water gliding through one's hands,
As if it kissed them to a sweet, dear death;
Like me enraptured with the films of air,
That farther than the utmost eye can reach,
Give sense of space and light and death profound,
They lost all human bonds and sank away
At Neptune's invitation fond. I swirl!
An illness seizes every sense,—I drown!
I swing! What forms and shapes invade my eye?
Already do I lose that poise of self

I boasted so serene? To men immune
Has Nature tempted me astray with guile?
Vivaldo! No! I turn to duty now.

(Enter Sven Hedvig.)

HEDVIG: Is not the breeze for you too sharp out here?

MARCIA: Why no,—it is not cold but over warm,—
My head is strangely sore and giddy sick,—

HEDVIG: Afraid? They told me you could fight the sea.
Already you flinch and fail and are saffron pale!
Suppose we made you master of this ship,
What would you do?

MARCIA: I should have so much to do
There would be no time for reverie and dream,
But your profession I would never choose,
Not even if by some strange chance I changed
My sex and had a man's triumphant field.
It seems to me you steer a brutal course
A tyrant to your men, of the winds a prey.
You shout and rave, stampede and shriek, apart
From every grace that binds a man to man,
And every gentleness that makes him fit
To be a woman's friend.

HEDVIG: I return the fire!
You stride the decks like an Amazon at bay.—

MARCIA: An Amazon!

HEDVIG: No softness in your glance, —
Throw off your robes and let your soul appear,
Your ardent soul that dares to criticise
In fields not yours. You say I shout and rave,—
Just place a siren's voice against the gale,—
Oppose the meadow-lark to the ocean's roar,
And learn like other landsmen early doomed,
From their own vanity's excess, to drown,
To drown from strangling fingers on your throat,
Those snaky tongues of ocean wave that clutch
The little man and stop his futile breath,
As huntsmen kill a timid quail for food.

(Enter the 1st Officer.)

OFFICER: Captain, what shall I do with Hones below?
He says his back is so bad he cannot work;
He claims the flogging you gave him yesterday
Has cut his flesh in stripes.

HEDVIG: The hound! He lies!

MARCIA: I heard him cry as you struck him in the hold.
For what offense, I pray?

HEDVIG: For laziness.

MARCIA: In stripes for that alone?

HEDVIG: You said just now
You would be well if you had a chance to work.
Tell him if he does not work I will strike again.

(Exit Officer.)

MARCIA: That is your common course with a tired crew?

HEDVIG: There is no other way.

MARCIA: Sometimes they die?

AEDVIG: That proves they are not fit for life at sea.

MARCIA: I think I could guide this ship with greater love.

HEDVIG: I accept the challenge,—begin at once with me.
As navigation you can never learn,
Just try command. To save you from the touch
Of rougher men, I make myself a crew.
I am a bachelor as free as air,—
Suppose you win my love, dictate my course,
Force me to choose your thoughts instead of mine.

MARCIA: I have no wish to play a game of love.
I do not want you vanquished through your sex.

HEDVIG: Why then, Miss Fleurmore, I will conquer you.
When two men meet far out at sea alone,
With God's great sky for witness over them,
And God's great ocean rolling dark below,
There is no such thing as an equal chance for both.

A brief, sufficient test of the stronger man,
Then all is peace, the master and his slave.
When man and woman unfettered meet like this,
The duel is perhaps of sharper steel,
And is perhaps of greater brevity.
The man, a victor, he claims an easy bride;
The woman supreme, she leads the man in chains,
The victim of his passion out of leash,
Too humbly walking after her,—subdued.

MARCIA: Falmouth Lansdowne and August Gosse were that!

HEDVIG: I did not hear?

MARCIA: A memory choked my thought.

HEDVIG: Already you have memories to your count,
Of conquests in the field of foolish men?

MARCIA: I never thought of them in that red light,—
I did not wish or try to humble them.
It simply happened so.

HEDVIG: What of my case?

MARCIA: Your talk is nonsense; you and I are friends;
Why should we fight for supremacy like beasts?

(She turns aside and gazes towards the west where the sun
is setting in a deep crimson sky.)

How all the western sky seems stained with blood,
As if the warriors who had died in all

Of earth's long course of monstrous gore-dyed wars,
Had gone for expiation to the sun,
And begged a monument in the sunset's tears!
Vivaldo spoke of war,—I must not flinch.

(She turns suddenly and faces Hedvig,)

Sven Hedvig, you are a cruel man and bold,
But I have no fear of you. If fight I must,
I will not shrink. I swear by the setting sun,
That, before this voyage has run its ocean course,
I guide this ship, its master,—you,—my slave!

HEDVIG: We are lonely here, the wind our only guest.—
And I with muscles braced from years of sea,
Am stronger far than you. In my embrace,
You cannot writhe. Once kissed, the day is mine.—

(He flings his arms around her,—she makes a violent effort
to resist him; then the ship gives a fearful lurch with
the rising breeze. They both pitch against the rail.

The sky grows dark. Marcia's beautiful
hair falls about her.)

MARCIA: Although I take this dangerous voyage alone,
I am not, as perhaps you think, a maid
Unarmed with pride. I am a bishop's ward,
And do not toy with chance or men or flame.
I do but what I must; release your hold,—
And bend your knee. Don't think a vulgar dog

Like you, who reeks of grime and crime and tar,
Could touch my lips and live to see next day.
We near the rail,—the vessel rolls and dips.
Increase the pressure of your arms and I hurl
Your body out to sea.

(As she is saying this, she is holding her hands firmly on his mouth, while he clasps her about the waist. Her magnetic eyes are fixed on his face. Suddenly, as if by hypnotism, his hands slip down, and he falls on his knees. Seeing him fall, she takes her hands from his face.)

HEDVIG: You can't do that!

But you have bewitched me past all thought or dream,—
Miss Fleurmore, I don't know who you are,—I don't,—
But something wild springs up within my breast,
And thrills my utmost being through with love.

MARCIA Believe me, I did not seek to win this end,
But only to make you feel your path was wrong.
Of all the powers that blend in a universe
Of stars and planets strung through endless space,
None is more divine than this you sail,
So buoyant and so soft, like ether fine,
Yet strong with all the force of infinitude,
Transparent to our eyes, yet deep as death,
And myriad-minded in its moods and whims.
The sea takes all our subtlest art to woo!

You need a wand to rule the angry waves.
The anger in your heart but beats on theirs
And lashes them to all an avenger's rage.
How brilliantly the evening star now mounts the west,
So large it seems a light at our mast-head,
Against the slumberous heliotrope of sky,
So effulgent in its piercing, searching beams,
It seems to challenge us to do a wrong,
To think in even inmost hidden thought,
An evil wish despoiling other men,
Or breaking through the surface loveliness
Of Nature's rich appeal, to find beneath
A devil lurking for his prey.

HEDVIG (still at her feet clasping her knees): Oh cease!
I cannot follow these ramblings of your brain,
When all my senses burn with pain for you.
You have won my love, and prostrate at your feet,
What forfeit will you pay? You have the helm,
And cannot now escape the consequence.
You must take the ship and me.

(There is a slight lurch of the vessel throwing both off
their balance for a second.)

MARCIA: What sound was that?

HEDVIG: The machinery has stopped,—an accident.
(Enter the 1st Officer.)

HEDVIG (rising from his kneeling posture and addressing the officer): What does this mean?

OFFICER: The men refuse to work.

Excited by the injustice done to Hones,
And other cases of abuse, they say
They will becalm the ship for days and weeks,
And render you so tardy in your port,
You forfeit both your rank and our command.

MARCIA: A mutiny far out at sea,—the night
Fast dropping in the west,—the sullen wind
With threatening voice loud screeching in our ears.
The passengers?

OFFICER: Are ours. We planned this trip
So that the travellers make a cause with us,—
And you alone it seems are on his side.

HEDVIG: Oh no, I think she fights and plots with you.
The finest nail in my coffin-lid was hers,—
My doom began when I cast my eye on her,
She has stirred my blood and sunk me at her feet,—
And now like curs you start a mutiny!

MARCIA: I never wished to bring about your fall.
I simply thought you brutal, wild and fierce;
And feared you would outrage the very sea
You sailed. You forced me to engage in fight,—

Declaring that you or I must hold the wheel.
I could not, dared not yield to you my will,—
And you went down.

HEDVIG: Then if you master me,
You master those who once were mine, the curs
Who mutiny to bring about my fall.
Officer, call up your men,—turn on the lights.
This woman is the master of your ship.

(There is a sound of rushing wind. It becomes dark as
night has set in, and the electric lights are turned on.)

MARCIA: What can I say? My mind is shrinking back
At its own fearless plunge. I must be myself,
Or run the risk of eternal punishment,
For supine yielding of my will. But still
My judgment totters, gropes and fears itself.
Sven Hedvig, I can but do my best or fail.

HEDVIG: I have never failed before as now I fail,
But sickly sweet through all my senses creeps,
A strange delirious joy. And this is man
When he falls beneath a woman's sway.

(The men of the crew and the passengers, who consist of a
handful of battered tourists, including two or three women,
the wives of men going out to India on commercial
business, assemble with surly expression.)

1ST OFFICER: Our master shows at once the craven face,
Abandons his command, but not to me.
This lady, Miss Fleurmore, rides the ship, he says.

(Turning to her.)

You see our case, we live like imprisoned beasts,
Whose life but alternates between the whip
And cage. On almost every voyage one dies
Too tender for the daily grind of pain,
Without a touch of love; and no one cares
Or reckons up the cost of lives thus paid,
To keep our captain in his berth of ease.

MARCIA: You are not called upon to die like that.
Sometimes when war has hung its crimson cloud
Athwart a nation's breaking heart, brave men
Must die, to win again the smiling sky
Of peace,—sometimes when foul dishonor stains
The escutcheon of a noble name, one goes
To prove the sweetest life not worth the price;
But otherwise we live to do the work assigned,
To love God's gift of life and light and air,
To lift our fellow-man and not to curse.
You do your duty in the hold below,
And dream of the home that waits in port for you.
In hours of rest, come here with me, aloft,
And let the harmony of winds and waves,

Beat such music on your tired brain,
You feel no hideous hate, but only love
So grateful for itself as love, it yearns
For all the years of immortality
To spend itself in giving love fulfilled.

1ST OFFICER: You will not let him beat us as he did?

MARCIA: All that in my power lies, I will do,
To keep him fast my prisoner. On shore
I will tell the truth to the master of marine.
And now, below. We ride an angry wave.
The Viking must reach her port at the given time.

1ST OFFICER: My men, what is your will?

THE MEN: The ship goes on.
Hurrah for the lady who holds the master down.

1ST OFFICER: Miss Fleurmore, thank you for your pains,—we go.
(Exit the men and passengers.)

HEDVIG: Arrived in India, you will be my wife?

MARCIA (starting back): I have important work to do out there,
And cannot marry until my youth is done:
Or perhaps not then; our friendship is for sea.

HEDVIG: And yet you dared to rob me of my will,
To steal my ship, my crew, my very self.
Sven Hedvig is not your soft-tongued dallying flirt

Who wastes his fickle heart each time he sees
A pretty face. Sven Hedvig loves but once,
And will pursue throughout his fevered days
The woman who betrayed him to his end.

MARCIA: For all my pains an enemy I make?
But now I cannot talk to you,—I faint.

(She staggers against the rail of the vessel.)

HEDVIG: You surrender then to me?

MARCIA: Be not deceived.

It is the sea,—I seem to feel its surge
Within my sickened brain, its pounding waves
Are beating all the tissues in my head,
And a trillion stars are dancing on my sight.
We roll! We plunge! The ship goes on and on.
I am so ill I cannot stand or speak,—
But I pray for you,—

(Hedvig sinks at her feet again.)

HEDVIG: I love you even now!

CURTAIN.

Act. 3. (Palace of Prince Mahatazama, India. A marble court with columns in porphyry and colored marbles and mosaics.

Handsome Oriental rugs on a marble floor. Marcia discovered alone. White Lingerie gown.)

MARCIA: The terrors of the mighty sea now past,
I almost wish them back, so strong, so rich,
The emerald waves thrust forth their diamond tongues;
And sprinkling all our face with fairy spray,
They seem to penetrate to our souls' lost bourn,
And touch its finest hidden chords to sound!
While here the air without vibration's beat,
Seems fraught with eerie thoughts and darkling fears.
It is so warm and yet so cold and still,—
The tropic fever-riot out beyond,
In the deepened deep of the jungle's moistened heat,
Is miles removed from our vision's utmost reach,
But I seem to hear the beasts that bellow there,
The anger of their savage, lower state,
Screeching to enlightened men for aid.
Meanwhile my host, like frozen bronze stands by,
And curls his lip to see my pulses beat,
And human color flood my maiden cheek.

(Enter a Hindoo servant with some papers and a letter on a tray, which he hands to Marcia. Marcia takes the letters and languidly opens one.)

MARCIA: From Hedvig! He then pursues me with his wrath!

(Reads.)

"Miss Fleurmore, I write from Java, our latest port.
Since our farewell, I have had time to think.
My simple sailor mind but creeps behind
The subtle leaps of mystic thought in yours.
I am a child who seeks the rainbow's end,
And finds it perfect in the boiling soap
Of bubbles destined to one moment's life.
My love is frank and fierce,—the love of a man,—
Your right and wrong are toys I toss to sea,
For a little stormy ride upon the waves,
Then extinction in the overwhelming flood.
It is only force that counts and with my force
I would crush you in my arms as the shell of pearl
Is crushed in the ocean caves of mighty rock,
And if you shrieked as once I heard you shriek,
With mutiny and rolling waves and me
To hem you in, why I should only laugh
To call a thing so sensitive my own.
Therefore, this voyage complete, I will follow you.
Again, let's chance the alluring clash of arms,
With you, the queen, and I, the under-man,
Or I, the striding Goth of olden times,
Who picks a wife as he would choose a horse,
And makes her one with his own craving flesh.

Perhaps the event will prove we both are lost,
So deeply wedded, knitted life to life,
We sink together in love's whirlpool maze,
Quite dead to sane endeavor or to fame,
But for each other steeped in sinful bliss.
There is no escape for you; I come next week.

(Enter Prince Mahatazama.)

PRINCE: I congratulate you on your safety here.
The ship you left has sunk with all on board.

MARCIA: What? The Viking? Hedvig and his men?
It cannot be! This letter in my hand
Has just arrived from the captain of the ship!

PRINCE: One day from Java a typhoon doomed her end.
Your letter was written the day before he sailed.

MARCIA: My heart shrinks back appalled,—I cannot think,—
This letter is a threat against my peace,
But he who wrote it is now food for sharks.

MAHATAZAMA: Be calm! His punishment has swiftly come.
He was your lover, I understand?

MARCIA: Oh no,—
I mean,—I cannot find the subtle words,
To express to you his pleading and his wrong.
I did not love him nor ever could at all,

For no reason that I could penetrate,
He seemed to wish to follow me.

MAHATAZAMA: I see!

Miss Fleurmore, this palace holds you as a guest:
As such I honor every step you take.
It is not my place to criticise your faith:
In India, there are Mohammedans
Who rejoice in many wives. That I have none
Is just my taste. They told me of your train,—
This brawling captain captured by the sea
Was fourth or fifth?

MARCIA: What wildness do you talk?

PRINCE: We are most liberal in this ancient land,
And if a man controls a dozen wives,
Why not a woman many feeble men?
I don't suppose you love them in the least,
But they love you, and just a little bit,
You find a rapture in your sway of power.
The last desire a man consents to sink
Into the self-denial fitting him
For presence in the chamber-halls of God
Is exercise of power. In haunted wilds
Where hermits flagellate themselves to win
The voices of the upper spirit-world,
I have seen a practiced monk who had to take

A thousand stripes a day to free himself
From lust of empire, dominion over men.
How much more a woman young and fair,
Who using both her beguiling sex and brain,
Has but to nod, to beckon and to smile,
And a lordling of the sea falls to his death!

MARCIA: It seems to me your manner sweet and cool,
Conceals a hundred bitter thrusts of pain;
As if I threw a velvet mantle on
And found its lining soaked in thick perfume,
Whose noxious chemicals were a poison blend,
Designed to shrivel the skin beneath the cloak.
You say through me poor Hedvig met his death;
I am a Turk who usurps the place of men,
Makes feminine the men who follow her.
I am greedy of this power, athirst for more!
I have not sinned like that; I live my life
But as I must; I cannot cease to be,—
I cannot take my bursting heart and say,
Beat not! I cannot stop my pulsing brain,
And say: Think not! I cannot stop my blood
From coursing through my veins like liquid fire.
Could you stop a cloud thick laden with the rain
From bursting through its flimsy ether walls?

PRINCE: I but measured you by the standard of our race.

In India it is not life we seek,
But the spirit's lift that comes with the body's death.
We eat no flesh and would not eat at all,
If life were possible on air alone.
We welcome pain,—the bride of our nightly couch.
Desire we strive to prick from its sloth and ease
As fangs from out a serpent's mouth or the thorn
Of cactus flowers piercing through the hand.

MARCIA: But pain is mine! No wish has reached my heart, —
I am alone in a fearful solitude,
The word approval unknown to my tired ear
That is almost torn to rags with jarring sound
Of voices aimed in wrath at my poor life.
I am a prisoner, who, for no sin I know
Or will with conscious mind, is condemned to bear
A punishment repeated without end,
And perhaps through immortality;
As if at birth some curse had strangled me,
And never in all my length of hopeless days,
I could escape the crime of being born.

PRINCE: With such a karma, you are ripe for us.
But burn and bleed a little more and then
You die to every mortal wish and hope.
The living dead alone have spirit life,—
You will walk a yellow shade amid the men

Whose purple lips still pout with pleasure's lust.
You killed Sven Hedvig and were justified,
Let me kill you but for a day,—a week,
And in the trance you may reach an avatar.

(He extends his hands over her head in a hypnotic way.)

MARCIA: Don't! Don't! I won't let go myself!
My head goes round,—I sink,—

(She falls in a half unconscious state on some cushions
and oriental rugs.)

PRINCE: The maid is ours!

(Exit Māhatazama. Marcia turns restlessly in a semi-unconscious state, groaning and tossing.

Enter Juan Diego.)

JUAN: What devil's play is this? Wake up! Wake up!

(Marcia struggles as if coming out of a trance, then
gradually regains consciousness.)

MARCIA: I thought I had died and seen the other world,
I seemed to see a garden full of light,
Of butterflies in amber, amethyst,
And peerless gold; of birds, cerulean blue,
And wondrous white; while men of olden time
Whose spirits ruled the earth, from tree to tree,
Flew light and swift as birds upon the wing.
I lay in pain so strong and tense and keen,

It was an ecstasy. I suffered so,
I seemed to reach the utmost bounds of pain,
And to cross beyond, where pain but kills itself,
In some strange bliss of those above the earth.

(Turns and sees Juan.)

Why who are you?

JUAN: I saved your life. My name
Is Juan Diego, an Egyptian from the Nile.
Egypt and India are not far apart.
I have commerce with this prince. Are you his guest?

MARCIA: I am an ambassador from northern lands,
By our most reverend bishop sent out here
To interview a native prince.

JUAN: Alone?
You ran a frightful risk,—you would have died
If I had not shaken you to coming life.

MARCIA: He challenged me with sin and stung my pride,—
I lacked the spirit life, and was a Turk.

JUAN: You are married then?

MARCIA: I am a maid,—he said I played the man.

JUAN: Perhaps we are alike,—I have three wives.
And you?

MARCIA: Don't speak the ugly thought.
No men are here; I am released I hope
From men who loved me more than I loved them.

JUAN: No men are here? You then count me as naught?

MARCIA: A man thrice married is scarcely in the ring,
Where maids and men toss back and forth the ball
Of love and try to learn if after all
The greatest of all human games is worth
The stake, a broken heart or one made sick
With too much surfeit of the thing desired.

JUAN: I think you heard my name, it does not lie.
I am the very fiend of novelty;
No woman pleases me for many days.
Until I read her soul unto the end,
My blood is ardent, my passion without brook.
But I must have something new, undone before,
A maiden who looks her first upon a man,
Or one, like you, who haughty, spurns our sex,
Or one so reckless she has lost her pride,
And given where she never meets return.
I like the proud, straight lines of your northern face,
Your strange predicament in this far land,
In the darkling gloom of a Hindoo palace lost,
A prisoner of magic and who knows,
Perhaps the bride of hell?

MARCIA: Your profession is,
You frankly own, the chase of womenkind;
Well then it seems that you and I to-day
Are wisely met; our path is much the same.
My strings of being play but chords of shame,
That thus I am forced to conflict with a Turk,
Compelled to meet him on an equal ground,
Yet I am urged by powers you cannot dream
To take this course repulsive to my heart,
And so abhorrent to my wish and will
I loathe each word I say and hate to see
My image in a glass and know myself.

JUAN: All this but brings you nearer to my taste.
My wives are stale; insipid, lacking brain,
Be you the fourth,—don't start,—you can't resist.
For one way lies your peril in these halls,
Strangulation and the deadly trance;
While I am life incarnate, glowing warm.
No woman ever pressed her lips to mine
And later dared to call her heart her own.
You are a mortal,—meet a mortal's clasp.

(Enter Falmouth Lansdowne and August Gosse in
tourist costume.)

LANSDOWNE: Miss Fleurmore, at last our starving hearts are
glad.

We have followed you half way across the world.

MARCIA: You knew I had to do this work alone?

JUAN: I think by the light within their hungry eyes,
I meet your ancient paramours or wives.

GOSSE: Oh say we are not so bad as that,
Miss Fleurmore is a friend, a comrade, chum.
She will not, dare not marry either one,
But others are too prim or else too cheap,
And so we follow her. We never know
What new and startling turn of her ardent mind,
Will introduce a queer, amazing dance,
To quicken our lazy limbs and prick the blood
That sluggish, jaded, tends to turn to bile.

JUAN: You probe the reason that I haunt her trail.
For women rather seek than fly my snare.

MARCIA: Oh God! will this sharp torment never cease?
How long imprisoned, fighting must I stay,
Within this torture-chamber of mad sense?
Black Caliban was not more flogged and striped.
Or do I wander in regions of the damned?
The very earth seems sewn with tiny snakes,
Which thrust their tongues like angry, sprouting weeds,
Up through the crust of earth, and would cause my fall,
By lacing themselves about my ankle wrists.

JUAN: Oh more and more you tempt me to a kiss;
I like to see a lovely creature writhe.

LANSLOWNE: Best change your mind, dear girl, and marry me.

MARCIA: I would if I dared,—I cannot stand this chase,
But I must obey Vivaldo's word or die.
I am Prince Mahatazama's guest. At least
I have the rich, cold shelter of his rank.

JUAN: So cold, an hour since you touched with death,
And welcomed me as bride the bridegroom's arms.
You must choose the frigid or the torrid zone;—
Must freeze in trances of most heathen art,
Or submit yourself to caress of sensual fires;
The longing of a feverish pulse like mine,
With these young dandies for your waiting maids.
Come now we are about on an equal plane;
I have three wives and you have two; we wed,
And see how long our Turkish hearts will rest
Without another craving of the sense.

MARCIA (falling on her knees): Great Power enthroned in
Eternal Light,
What can I do? The darkness clusters thick
Above my head, its dim smoke windings dense
Obscuring every beam from moon or star.
I dare not falter from Vivaldo's task,

Although I see no way to fulfill its end.
I cannot bear the hurts they fling at me,—
My eyes so smart with weight of unshed tears,
My very optic nerve seems crossed with thorns.
Oh save me from the Egyptian and the fiends!

GOSSE: Don't try to do a thing impossible,—
Take me or Lansdowne, don't be wild and rash.
Come home and lead the life a lady should.

MARCIA: Oh cease your silly prayer or I go mad,
You dilettantes who toss me to and fro,
As if I were a billiard ball for play,
For whom there is no sacredness in love,
Or reverence for the word of God in Heaven.
The moment that I lay in throes of death,
There fell upon my startled, blissful gaze,
The vision beatific,—Nirvana's goal;
That could not come from murder's base deceit;
Can Fairyland be born from rotten crime?
And attar of roses' perfume rise from slime?
Where is the prince? I call him back,—come back!

(Enter the Prince.)

PRINCE: Miss Fleurmore, I have been behind the screen,
To protect you from the advances of this moor.
We have some commerce with him on the coast,
He controls a mighty host of Africans,

And we know him for a dangerous friend.

JUAN: Not half so dangerous as you, black prince.
I bring to life with kisses of warm blood,
The victims you would kill for killing's lust.
You murder,—I caress; and thus opposed
We stand to fight,—this lovely girl between,
With none to aid but these young dandies here,
Who follow in her court but have no power
To move her mind or drop the scale an inch
For you or me.

LANSDOWNE: We are better out of this.
We cannot help her plight, let's leave and wait.

GOSSE: She is so obstinate, exalted, odd.
She repudiates her friends for foes like these.
It is useless to remain. Farewell.

(Exit Lansdowne and Gosse.)

JUAN: And now
Your choice is but between the prince and me;
But breathe consent, my harem doors fly wide.
Refuse and find yourself fast clutched in hell.

MARCIA: Descend the blade of choice, Dear prince, your guest
Must claim the shelter of your roof once more.

PRINCE: At last I pluck the thorn from your regal soul.
No more you will to rule the hearts of men,

But seek instead the selfless path of peace.—
Secure in contemplation's ecstasy,
From passion's ugly glare, the wince of shame,
The pursuit of wealth, the horror of war and hate.
Diego, leave us to our thought's pure aim.

JUAN: I leave you till in the corpselike clutch of trance,
You call once more for rescue from the tomb

(Exit Juan.)

PRINCE: Miss Fleurmore, you would walk Nirvana's heights?

MARCIA: Just now it seemed the stage was cleared of foes,
That you and I were here alone; but a voice
Rings in my ear and sweetly calls to me.
It calls in accents sweeter than all sound
Of birds and violins in unison,
"I love you now and would through time to come,
Although to both love's fondness were denied."
The day I left for my tour of this far world,
I met a man of wise deep eyes and brow,
All marked with soft reflections of old art,
And myriad sensibilities superb.
He was from France, a stranger to the west.
He turned his far discerning gaze on me,
And seemed to fathom in my heart of hearts,
A truth no other soul could faintly feel.
A moment my tortured, young, half sightless eyes,

Encountered some long-held pain fast locked in his,
And that was all, but there seemed a promise then,
That I should never be a desert isle,
Alone in ocean's pathless wilderness,
With coral reefs of aching teeth exposed.
Today in all our pomp and gloom, my dread
Of loneliness and demon spirits near,
Is soothed by that sweet voice which penetrates
Half way across a world.

PRINCE: You are our kind;
A novice now, you might reach the highest rank,
Of those whose subtle souls transcend the earth.
(There is a sound of howling from without.)
What sound is that?

(Enter a servant.)

SERVANT: Diego's shriek of pain.
Some word has just arrived from Egypt's shores,
Stating a hundred Egyptian Moors were slain,
By English soldiers fighting to the teeth.
Diego, pale with rage, fell in a spasm,
And now we think has breathed his last on earth.

MARCIA: My God! What trail of bloodshed do I make?
The Viking sank to death with all on board,
And now this Moor and his tribe are a holocaust!
How the Reaper follows where I tread,—

And for each sin of vicious, cruel men,
Cuts off some scores of lives,—yet I remain,
To sacrifice again and yet again,
Although I wander swathed in awful crepe,
From battlefield to battlefield of slain.
My prince, I don't remain with you, there points
An order to another scene of strife.

PRINCE: Remain for Diego's funeral rites.

MARCIA: I fly
From further vision of this cinder trail.
Ivry,—oh, dare I breathe the thought of love?

CURTAIN.

Act. 4. (Scene, a public office in a high public building in New York City. John Custing, a sharp-faced, middle-aged man, a capitalist by profession, seated in this handsomely appointed office, fitted with all modern conveniences of iron safes, telephones, typewriters, etc.)

CUSTING: I can't see why this day has been so slow.
Before the stroke of three I should hold in hand,
Five thousand cash on yesterday's exchange.
How can I build my mansion in red stone,
Or launch my railroad stock in foreign lands,
If brokers do not bring their profits in?

(Enter Marcia.)

A woman! Well, what do you want?

MARCIA: I come

To probe the methods of this house of wealth.

CUSTING: A female detective on my track, by Jove!
What warrant have you for this hireling's work?

MARCIA: My warrant none, but authority so high.
I cannot name it to one I hold profane.
I have travelled half way around the restless globe,
To find why millions writhe in poverty,
Seem stung to death for faults that are not their own.
Poor plants that wither in the killing frost,
They seem as strangers to the kissing sun;
No wind that sings with music of the spheres,
Seems ever to have touched their sunken cheek.
They struggle alone with tyrant human kind,—
Oppressed by drunken cruelty at sea,—
The playthings of an Egyptian's passion black;
The sport of sages who experiment
In flesh and living heart, or the easy dupes
Of men whose idleness slides down to vice
In sickening swamps of enfeebled sentiment,
They have no chance to live their common life
Of love and work and some far, sweet reward.
And now I reach the steepest height of all,

The tyranny of wealth expressed in stone,
More stern and gray than ancient battlements,
Of power more malign than feudal jails.
My ears are burning as if the shame were mine,
At the shrieks of hunger I heard in squalid streets.
To try to live when others will with grasping hate,
To have you die, and take from you
The means of life, is anguish of a type
The Inquisition hardly could outboast.
Yet here you sit and waste your millions' power
In building more and more for wealth, and less
And less to mold the spirit's upward aim.

CUSTING: Too much already we give to beggar thieves,
Their lives but curse our city's splendid pride.
'Tis better they should die and leave us free.
It is life for life,—we win the controlling wealth—
They fail for lack of wits,—not ours the fault.

MARCIA: Unless you win by theft.

CUSTING: I pray take care.
I have with patience born your intrusion here.
But my power, you know, is limitless, immense.
I simply tap an electric bell, you go
To a place of silence, solitude and death.

MARCIA: You then admit your power beyond all bounds.
You cannot charge me with committed crime

Or any yet attempted though you claim
You could deprive me of my freedom here.
Can no one move that hardened mouth of yours?
Have you never softened to a woman's smile,
Or felt the richness of your lot a pledge
To ameliorate a suffering not your own?

CUSTING: I should think you had already seen enough
To prove I have no fondness for your sex.
My wife keeps house for me,—is also rich,—
Our days are much consumed with servants' bills.
What is your price?

MARCIA: My price? What can you mean?

CUSTING: You have some secret you would sell for gain,—
You threaten something vile in viler press.
But money fades the blackest ink that is thrown.

MARCIA: You pull yourself into more tangled nets.
I have never looked upon the eye of gold,
But with fear just mixed with sad contempt.
I am not here to plead a cause my own,
My cause does not exist,—I lost myself
In India's transcendent mazes of the soul.
I want to help the hungry, dying men
Who line your streets as running sores deface
The skin of a lovely child.

(The telephone rings.)

CUSTING: I have no time
To listen to your socialistic rant,
But beware the scratch of my long and crooked claws.

(Goes to the phone.)

At last the market bends my way, I win!
I have not a minute more to spare to you,—
Stay here or go,—I know your face. Your name?

MARCIA: I am Marcia Fleurmore.

CUSTING: I will find your price.

(Exit Custing.)

MARCIA: Oh, for the wild, mad dash of Hedvig's love,
The salt of the sea and the throb of its mighty swell.
Oh for Mahatazama's marble gloom,
And the pungent spice of Mrs. Helden's fete!
The endless sands of rolling desert land,
That bands itself on Africa's burning breast,
Must hold the far-off whisper of a hope,
Compared with this dead strand of commerce might.
This greed of wealth like a giant with one eye,
Sees nothing in the world but what's before.
Behind are purple seas with boats of gems,—
To the right, the gardens of Paradise bloom sweet,
And left, are all the hearts of all the world,
Just sobbing out their yearning human want,
While underneath a magic carpet rolls,

Of Eastern velvets intertwined with lace:
But all it sees, is just before those bricks,
That pile on pile advance with growing strength,
A soulless mammoth of an ungodly size.

(Enter Leonardo Dulci, an Italian scavenger of great natural
beauty, but dressed in filthy rags.)

DULCI: Pardon, may I stay a moment here?
They pursued me down the halls, I am out of breath.

MARCIA: Yes, stay and rest, though I usurp the right.
This is the secret hold of a man of wealth.
He despises me because I love the poor,
So you I fear would be scarcely welcome here.

DULCI: I am, you see, of God's most humble poor,
Employed in work much worse than servitude,
And getting that but now and then from chance.
They hold me for a Revolutionist;
I may or may not be, what does it count?
Each day I wake I wonder if I shall see
The sun again this side the river death.
They call me beggar, thief and wish my life,
But still I am a human soul that kneels.
Something deep, far-reaching in your eye,
Draws me to you as to a priest benign,
Who hears the sobs of the confessional.

MARCIA: Speak on,—your beauty might make Venus blush.
You say my eyes hold sympathy for you,—
Why yours seem to glance at me through years
Behind the years of our short mortal life.
The soft, far perfume of a Roman night,
Comes stealing through my senses' memory,
As if I had walked with you in Caesar's time,
In some old garden behind a Roman wall,
Where the marble statues peering through the trees,
Were comrades of the tryst we made.

DULCI: The tryst
Of love and youth and something worth the while,
An empire throbbing to expanding life
Through worlds of north and south barbaric land,
Its great heart pulsing in our veins, the blood
Of glory nerving us to far, far ends.
To-day I am the remnant of a hope,
Am held to be the lowest of the low,
Beneath the vilest proletariat scum,—
Half naked and a beggar for my food,
I beat the cruel pavements of the streets,
While only once in many days there peeps
Through day-dreams of the sultry afternoons,
The vision of what I might have been, or yet
Might be. I could love, if I dared to love at all,

With such a fervor of the sense and soul,
No poet in his mystic dreams could leap
To follow me. You lure me on to talk.
I don't know who you are,—your face is sweet,—
Shall we pretend just for the hour that Rome
Is here, that Time's old blistering pain has past;
That while the gods in loving care look down
And bless our love, we sway in ether wrapped,
With heart to heart through all the realms of art?

MARCIA: Oh don't! This is like life to one long dead.
They tell me I must never think of self,
But forward urged by duty strong as God.
Must fight the tyrant, and the scourge of crime,
And never poise an instant in the void,
To think of flute-like music whispering sweet.
I have known so many men whom I despised,
It is an ecstasy to speak with you,
To find the spirit's rich expanse and glow,
In a life so fettered with denial's ache.

(She takes his hand and they stand a moment looking
deeply into each other's eyes. There is a sound of
scuffling in the hall.)

DULCI: I must go,—my enemy awaits,—one word,—
If we meet again on Hades' shores or here,
My soul through all this filth and grime, could still
Divine your own. Farewell,—our God abides.

(Exit Dulci.)

MARCIA: Abides! Thank God, my harp of being sounds!
So poor, so sad, so lone, he is a slave,
His life so framed for all that makes men man,
Is crushed beneath the heel of rampant wealth.
An oasis in the desert of my course,
He gives me strength to storm the fort once more.
The flames of vengeance rising in my breast
Should sweep this icy monster from his perch.

(A few minutes' silence. Marcia tense. A noise and scuffling.

Enter Custing looking pale and angry.)

CUSTING: You still are here!
You heard the crash,—a man was killed just now.
Some devil's prank,—the elevator shaft
Gave way,—he was crushed like mince-meat hatchet—chopped.

MARCIA: Not an Italian scavenger?

CUSTING: You knew
The man? An accomplice perhaps with you in crime?
A grimy beast who took the ashes out,
We knew him for a bloody conspirator
Against the rich,—his enemies not a few.

MARCIA: Oh sweet and beautiful spirit gone so soon!
Just now I spoke with him,—he hid from foes.

(To Custing.)

Azrael!—Is there within your breast a heart,
Or are you but a human guillotine,

You are so deaf to cry of human woe?

CUSTING: Be still. I will send you to no easeful end,
If you do not name a price and go.

MARCIA: I will do both at once. My price the lives
Of these poor men you starve to death or kill.
Good-bye! Remember me! My weapon Truth!
(Exit Marcia.)

CURTAIN.

Act 5. (An attic in a ramshackle rookery in an old part of New
York City. Several years later. Marcia alone.)

MARCIA: How long, great God, this fearful siege, how long?
Desire's pulse so weakly beats within,
It seems I never was a human heart,
But just this instrument by Vivaldo strung,
Just flogged and torn to avenge my plunge of youth.
Imprisoned here by Custing's wealth and hate,
As impotent as worms that crawl the earth.
I can but wait and pray, while run my breasts
With flowing milk for all the stricken poor.
Alone, my tortured nights Golgotha's feast,
Mahatazama's questions haunt me still.
I seem to dwell beyond the styx with him,
The grisly veil of ignorance withdrawn,

And all the concourse of the dead on view.
Sven Hedvig's shrieks have pierced their watery shroud:
He accuses me and mocks and moans and cries,
"You could have saved me from the strangling sea,—
Perfidious witch, may you come to me in hell!"
Diego makes his tryst with Lucifer,
And swings his burning brand against my face,
As if I were in truth his degraded wife,
The fourth to fall beneath his quenchless lust.
When dawnlight comes with mystic wings of pearl,
To shame the filthy city's gray expanse,
As the old world's soul to shame its rotting corpse,
I see once more the Italian man of grime.
What dreams of God, what hopes of bliss and truth,
What debris of the things that ought to be,
Shone through his coat of Poverty's foul slime:—
Like Grecian marbles in Pompeii's dust,
Which glow like filtered moonbeams fixed in stone
From out a mountain chain of covering earth.
Oh sweetness of that soul, so near to death,
It already shone resplendent and untouched
By all the weight that would have dragged it down!
This strange sweet consolation still is mine,—
The vision of something dearer than this world,
Which pierces to Andromeda's poor heart,

As naked and alone she hugs the rocks.

(There is a knock at the door.)

A knock? A brutal word from Custing then?

(She goes to the door and admits Gosse.)

How have you found my place of hiding here?

GOSSE: The police were on your trail;—but you have changed!
Your face once brilliant as the summer-rose,
Is wan and pale,—your hair is silver white.

MARCIA: I see you do not love me any more!

GOSSE: Why don't you say that of course we still are friends.
But you spurned me when like a poodle dog,
Or lackey trained to smirk and fawn and cringe,
I followed you across two continents.
I liked your rebellious fury, your blood-red rage,
The tingling from your brain to pulse of mine.
But you have been so whipped on Vivaldo's wheel,
That fantastic thrill has now succumbed
To duty's pale defense,

MARCIA: And Lansdowne too!

GOSSE: Convention pulled him with too tight a string.
His passion led him many lengths for you:
But then ashamed, confused, he ran for home,
And begged Miss Lingard from her guardian's charge.

MARCIA: He is married then?

GOSSE: So snug and tight he rests,
Within the bishop's little social round,
Domestic, satisfied, correct and sleek,
You would not dream he had been humbled once,
Before your maddening beauty and your scorn.

MARCIA: I do not quail,—I did not expect your love
Would last, or survive my youth's eclipse; and now
The somber Autumn years begin to fall,
And I am tired, gray and very sad,
Sensation's fires die in your fickle breast.
But tell me then just why you seek me out?

GOSSE: Vivaldo is dead: he left for you his will.
Take it and read.

(Marcia takes the letter, breaks the seal and reads with
trembling voice.)

MARCIA: "Dear child, my ninety years,
Already a stretch of our poor mortal span,
Are worn so thin their tissue soon will break,
And set me free to roam with spirit cleansed,
From the long dark dust of struggling human clay.
Before I go, I wish to set you free
From the task sublime imposed upon your youth.
I made that youth a sacrifice to God;
I spent it to repel black manhood's vice,—
And see for all my pains an approaching peace.

A holy fear descending like a cloud,
Whose heavy thunder holds but gracious rain,
Restrains the savage from his brutal course.
I know the fires of your youth are dimmed;
I know that once encased in duty's thrall,
You never can become the slave of will,
Or throw the gauntlet to a mad desire.
Nor can one once be face to face with wrong;
Have looked upon the putrid pools of sin,
And rise again to selfish freedom's ease.
Swing out and try to win the souls of men,
Just by the force of soul refined and pure.
You fought with all your flame of youth to kill
The ruffian, sensualist and plutocrat.
Now let them learn the other truth long-lost,
That the sweetest ecstasy of love on earth,
And the fairest dream of love we hope in Heaven,
Is the blend of spirit truth with truth enwrapped.
I do not reward you for your ardent work,
For I know that Heaven's love will come to you."

(Marcia falls on her knees, puts her head on the window
sill and begins to weep violently.)

GOSSE: Miss Fleurnmore, do not weep, you now are free.

MARCIA: Vivaldo's wisdom cuts like diamond steel.
I am free the moment I know it is too late!

There is no freedom for the conscious soul,
Who knows the world's deep irony of sin,
And all the love Almighty God commands.
I am broken, broken on the wheels of right,
And yet so chained to its eternal pain,
I cannot even wish to fly its hold.
And you a prostitute of the stronger sex,
So shameless in your love for human flesh,
Now leave my presence, seek a younger lust!

GOSSE: Marcia, your embers glow! The twilight gray
Brings out the stars, a mystic glamor still
Is in the suffering of your eyes;—I stay!

(There is a knock at the door. Marcia rises hurriedly from
her kneeling posture and opens the door to admit
Mahatazama.)

(Gosse steps aside and looks out of the window.)

PRINCE: I find you at last, oh wonderful, magic maid!
We spend our lives in search for holy truth,
And through ascending flagellation grades;
Made pale by hunger, thirst and sleepless nights,
We seek communion with Nirvana's host.
But sometimes strangely falls the gift divine
To those who seek it least; as if the search
Held somewhat of presumption, like a flower
Which disdained to bloom for a fleeting life,

And begged instead an endless shape in wax,
And for that vaulting wish were condemned to lose
The perfume whose essence is the soul of art.
We want you there where marble vies with heat,—
Serene within the monastery's ice,
With angels writing psalms upon your brain,
And something of God's truth descending swift,
With lightning whiteness to inform our gloom,
And make our seeking worth its fevered strain.

MARCIA: Dear Prince, you honor me beyond all words,
But I cannot go with you, I must stay here,—
You know that men are dying in the streets;
Poor insects withered by the summer heat,
They fall in flocks; they don't know how to live,—
A giant hideous in its mammoth strength
Has coiled its limbs across their chimney tops;
And crushed them back to their too welcome graves.
For money fat and fatter ever grows,—
His paunch is bursting with the fruit of earth.
I must stay here and hold the wheels of death,—
My feeble hand the blackened lever clasps,
And I look the grisly foe straight in the face.
The gates of hell in front on their hinges swing,
And polluted sulphur flames belch in my face.
I cry for vengeance on the money thieves,—

And mercy for the poor dumb souls in chains.

(Gosse turns from his position at the window.)

GOSSE: Marcia! Your work has turned your brain,—you rave,—
I cannot stand in your spirit's burning ray.
Its incandescence cuts right through my flesh.
I leave you with a fearful thirst for drink,—
I have to drink to drown my thought of you.
To remember is to yearn with nerves that break,
Frail twigs dipped down by the sweet fruit they bear.
To see you is to hate you for this pain.
Farewell.

(Exit Gosse.)

MARCIA: I am doomed to bruise each life I touch.
An electric wire that is too highly charged,—
I burn my way where I would only heal.

(There is a sound of shouting in the streets.)

PRINCE: 'This place seems like a tortured madman's cell,—
What shrieks defile the calmness of your streets?

(Marcia goes to the window.)

MARCIA: The newsboys cry some tragic crime out loud,—
Silence! What do they say? "John Custing dead!"
"Great millionaire oppressor of the poor
Is murdered; his barber cut the greedy throat."
This man has been my enemy for years,—
It was his will I was imprisoned thus,

And left to struggle with no aid but prayer,
Against his relentless wall of blasting gold.
His death is my release.

PRINCE: You come to us?

MARCIA: My path of duty is the same; one inch
The locomotive sways from its downward track.
I breathe! But how much more of will and might,
Before it splinters in a million bits,
And leaves us free to take our upward course!

PRINCE: It seems to me you work with futile aim.
Why try to raise the dead from sagging swamps?
For one step out, you sink a hundred in.
You cannot lift the mass of humankind,
But you can lift yourself a thousand fold.
Why seek to stud with pearls a wall of stone,
When in the effulgence of our temple's light,
You might reach your zenith with the avatar?

(There is a knock at the door. Marcia opens it and
admits Ivry.)

MARCIA: Somewhere in memory's cloudland curtain folds,
I seem to see your face.

IVRY: I met you once
Long years ago, before you left your home,
To fight Vivaldo's foes throughout the world.

MARCIA: You are then the one who spoke a soothing word,
When I was saddled with my task of war?
Ah! How I remembered your accents soft
In later throes when demons round me pressed,
And slashed and cut right through my core of life.
This is the prince who was my India host,
When with an Egyptian Turk I clasped in hate.

PRINCE: I found such pleasure in this lady's mind,
I come to invite her to remain with us.
In contemplation she so far excels
We hope to make her a Brahmin of our faith.

IVRY: As rivals then we meet, dear prince, to-day,
For I have come to take her home with me.
Miss Fleurmore, I have watched your warrior course.
When you thought that you were quite alone,
Argus eyed, our spies were on your track.
Victoria waits for you with open arms,
And I,—but I will not speak of that just now.
The fan-like path of choice spreads out for you.
The life of Oriental mystic bliss,
Or your western home, where now we hope
Old bruises have been healed, and love long sore
From jealous strife, finds joyous life again,
From harmony you wrought so hard to win.

MARCIA: Prince Mahatazama, perhaps, next time,
My soul from this old body freed, returns
To earth, I will seek your treasured wisdom's height.
But now, for these few years remaining me,
With duty's iron mail still round my breast,
And the pulses of my being beating slow,
From too much anger, too much pain and grief,
The western world retains my heart's poor end.

PRINCE: I must obey,—until another life,
Good-bye.

(Exit the Prince.)

IVRY: Your ardent path too long has lain
Apart from all the reaches of desire,
For, made a sacrifice to others' ends,
The very nerves of self are palsied, dead.
We meet at the angle of two different roads,
For I grew old and ill with pampered self.
I walked through Europe end to end for years;
Ecstatic with the thrill of art divine.
I probed the deeds of men for my psychic feast,
And hunted to their lair the fashion queens.
I roamed the mountains of the newer world,
Where Heaven's pure canopy spread undefiled,
Above the crests and vales of the Andes chains,
And where the Rockies challenge with their might.

My nerves acute to every shade and line
That marks the bound between perfection's height,
And beauty that is less, fell ill with ache
For loveliness supernal excelling all
Our tired, finite eyes can ever search.
It was then I met you, an egotist like me,
Yet destined to a brutal suicide
Of all that essence which cries to be itself,
And sobs: "My soul is mine, and I am I!"

MARCIA: My ego now is dead, as if a host
Of warring fiends had trampled it in dust,
Then prisoners quick upon the trace of crime,
Had buried the ashes deep within the earth,
So that there was no choice twixt clay and clay.

IVRY: Yet like a child you must begin again,
And say: "I wish and I desire, I live."

MARCIA: I cannot feel that thrill with work to do
And millions suffering from the lash of hate.

IVRY: Suppose instead of seeking music trills,
Of rapture in the art of other days,
I throw my tingling soul a gift to you,
And while you let yourself be loved and kissed,
I take your place against the wall of gold.

MARCIA: You do not know the whirlpool that I cast.
I walk a step and strike a blow for right.—

Next day I stand amid a sea of blood.
Some Avenger from on High completes the work,
And kills where I have simply pricked the skin.
With this am I a candidate for love?

IVRY: Although I sought and sought for woman's face
And woman's soul to love, I missed my goal,
As I missed the vision of the world to be,
The palace thrones of opal diamond light,
That wait behind the sunset's mighty blaze,
Of color thrown in aerial gossamer,
But now I meet a splendor in your eyes,
Where long fatigue and bitter pain have tried
In vain to plant a thorn. Our different paths
At last have joined. You see the evening falls
Upon the weeping city weak of soul;—
It is too much for you to fight alone.
Come, will you take my hand?

(Twilight sets in and it is almost dark. They both look old
and worn with tired faces, white hair and sad eyes.)

MRACIA: I cannot see,
There is a dimness in my heart and brain,
But in my solitude in Hindostan,
Your spirit came to me: I heard your voice.
Perhaps it is ordained,—

IVRY: I love you dear.

CURTAIN.

Unconsecrated Love

If I were of this world, and this alone,
An atheist child that reckless runs and leaps
To catch his glancing shadow in the corn,—
The miser hoarding self to self so grown
He hardly knows the world without, but weeps
The tears of joy frustrate, when love is torn
From his embracing,—
I would be racing
To steal your fluttering heart and clasp it to my own.

So color-blind that black looks violet-blue,
And battle's blood is juice of joyous grape,
Unconscious of that snake they call a sin,
With only craving for the lights that woo
The amorous ship that beats about the cape
Where waiting landsmen signal to call her in,
All right defying,
I would be trying
To reach you through the barriers that our pathway strew.

Together we would parade the purple groves
Where license is the perfume of a prince,
Whose fall but leads fair women to his tryst,—
Together walk the heights where scandal roves,
Too rich in sweet communion to feel a wince
Of shame because we had too often kissed:
Just self regarding,
The world retarding,
Like sea-shells drunk with love of surf in windy coves.

What matter if our royal car of ease,
Crashed through a hospital of wounded hearts,
And broke the headstones of a hundred graves,
And in the ashes of our path the trees
Were withered as if by lightning's vengeful darts?
For us the inward ecstasy that raves;
To bliss still clinging,
In rapture singing,
When all the loftier hopes of man to fossils freeze.

Have I said too much to spell the word "regret?"

Dare Imagination picture guilt

Untamed a Pegasus that rides the air,

Aspires and never looks behind to fret

His flight with others' clumsy tilt

Against a fate that sickens in despair?

The thought entrancing,

I must be lancing,

For love unconsecrate, to death must pay its debt.

Yet through the lattice of my wall,

The moonlight cold upon the convent floor,

The cloister whispering with the brooding dead,

While deeply, silently, I pray for all

Immersed in Satan's ruthless torrent roar,

It cannot be a sin to shrink in dread,

From your heart breaking,

While my soul awaking,

Still lingers on that first forbidden thrill and thrall.

When once has burst upon the startled sight,
The vision of the ecstasy to be,
And all the love of draining out the pain
That makes men dwarfs imprisoned in the night,
How small the wish to be again quite free,
To bathe in joy all reckless of the stain!
The past erasing,
My hope is tracing,
The hieroglyphics of a higher love in light.

Oh do not count this, death, dear heart, long passed,
The very echo sounding hollow, strange,
To ears that strain to hear the chord divine;
For if again I walked blindfold, downcast
The wilderness that marked our love's exchange,
And some true friend would your heart's need define;
In love unseeing,
I would give my being,
In that mistake that would a virtue prove at last.

And if the faith that leads men's staggering stride,
Now glows like starlight, vivid, shining, clear,
Now murky as a city's smoke appears,
But yet suffices for their beacon-guide,
Perhaps my "might-have-been" will drop a tear,
To save the rose the blast of winter sears.
Your love enfolding,
I would be molding
My life to yours, if this world were the only tide.

The Ruse Sublime

A Tragedy in 3 scenes

Characters:

BISHOP BRAINTREE, High Priest and Supreme Dictator of the
City of Sacramento;

RURIC ARCHIBALD, his Secretary;

CECIL FABER, Leader of Legitimists, or Church Party,
Candidate for Governorship of the State;

GREGORY GRIFFITH, Chief Conspirator of the Opposition.

Scene 1.: Residence of Bishop Braintree, Sacramento.

Deathbed of Braintree. Twilight.

BRAINTREE: Just lift the curtain and let the evening light
Send cool effulgent shadows to my brain.
For all my life, my one persistent cry
Has been for cooling bands to soothe my head.
Around me everywhere a tropic storm
Of myriads wrestling with their hot desires.
The temple of my brain resisting vice
Yet burns with thoughts that rushing towards the light,
Like jewels piled on jewels, countless gems

Give to their incandescent heat of mind,
A surfeit of the very things it craves.
So much I seem to see and feel and think,
My brain a book without a final page,
Whose wisdom must be read and learned by heart,
It seems I am too young to die to-night.
I stand to speak the valedictory
Of an ardent youth who casts a look intense
With deathless fondness for the halls he leaves,
Knowing he steps into a path untrod,
Whose vistas throb with combat and salt tears,
The brambles and the twisted trees all hung,
With stalactites cold and dripping morning dew;
Yet a moment rests with speechless love
And wistfulness untold to the youth that flies.

RURIC: Dear Bishop, let me press your lips with wine,
A little while your life must linger here:
You see the shadows cluster round our sight.
We sink beneath the earth, our lives entombed
In caverns foul where miners delve for gold.
Our lungs accustomed to the breath of gas,
We do not know the ozone that floods the heights.
The sod upon our heavy grave just parts
And lifts to give a glimpse of smiling sky,
When you, downbending, pity our dull plight.

BRAINTREE: You would not longer lock my prison cell,
Just as I see its portals swing out free,
And know I am to enter realms of love?
In youth they robbod me of that boon sublime,
Diverted every hope that fluttering throbbed
Within that angel's dream we call a heart,
That I might do the holy work you beg.
Through days of toil that each a century seemed,
I ploughed the fields of rugged human lives.
Persuasion, the relentless god who held the reins
Of the chariot I was compelled to drive with him,
Forever lashed me forward to his ends;
A sculptor condemned to use a blacksmith's tools,
With molten iron instead of marble's gleam,
The feeble sand instead of chiselled gold,
I worked till my hands were torn in bleeding rags,
And my soul with pallid glare beheld itself
In the torments of a task impossible.
A pilgrim who climbs a mountain without a peak,
He ever hopes to see or reach,
I staggered on, and struggled with the dolts,
Without a hope that divinity would pierce
Their thickened skulls and shadowed, thankless hearts.
I painted dolls in draperies of silk,—
Created models for them to bow before,
Hoping that in admiration's trance,

The delirium that the exquisite evokes,
They would succumb to imitation's ease.

RURIC: Dearest teacher, they have succumbed, they are won!
They reverence every word you say as law!
The lovely silver cadence of your voice
Can face them towards the martyr's blazing strand,
When they stand imbedded deep in sloth,
Soothed and drugged by narcotics of the sense,
And drowning in a honey gulf of ease.
At your command, our Faber wins the state,—
Without you, I fear that Griffith's ugly strength
Will lead them all in golden chains to hell.
Do let me press your lips with wine, so that
You live a little longer for our cause.

BRAINTREE: Already the beatific vision falls
Upon my glazing eyes. How sweet is death!
No single face that life has ever shown,
No thought, no love, no fulfilling of the sense,
Has ever filled my being with such bliss,
As this ecstatic parting of the ways,
This thrilling absence of the monster pain,
This rapturous leap toward glories of the clouds,
Where form is life and color essence soul!
I cannot stay: already I have passed,
And speak to you from beyond the dividing line

We name as dissolution. Dear friend, good-bye!

RURIC: Why am I mad! Do you speak or do I dream?
You are here and yet you are not here,—a light!
The darkness presses cold upon my heart,
His hand has dropped. And some one steps below,—
The state is lost;—unless—unless—do I dare?
How do I know he will not speak again!
The door is locked and no one enters here.
A ruse! The state! Oh God be with us now!

CURTAIN.

Scene 2. (Library of Ruric Archibald in Braintree's house. Two weeks later. Gregory Griffith discovered alone.)

GRIFFITH: To think I stand opposed by only one
Who could my high ambition's aim frustrate!
Just one, but that one stronger than all my wealth,
As long as superstition sways weak men:
But two great motives bend their feeble course,—
They cringe with fear before a Druid voice,
That seems to catch its tone from higher realms,—
Or else they drown themselves in seas of gold.
Sometimes whole centuries pass without this voice,
To awe them to obedience beneath the whip,
In craven fear of unknown wrath to come;
And then the day is ours, and ours the night,

When perfume steals inebriate on the sense,
And sleepy drugs have lured to soft desire.
The crowd then slumbers in luxury's fond embrace,
With sex aflame on feathery, downy beds,
And has no fear unless it be the doubt
That to-morrow will be less luscious than to-day,
We seize the reigns of power and rule at will,
No opposition piercing to our throne,
From men asleep on couches of delight.
With Braintree dead, I should hold the summit's crown
As safe upon my towering peak as if
A million guardsmen hemmed my fortress in;—
For none so loyally defends his king,—
As a soldier bought with drink and drugs.
To kill the old man were a simple task,
If once his nose appeared before the door.
This Archibald, I think a cunning brute;
To prevail upon him a work of subtle depth.
I hear his step.—

(Enter Cecil Faber.)

GRIFFITH: We meet most strangely here,
Rivals in the bishop's inner sacred crypt.

FABER: I come for his final word to cheer the men
In a fight where the heroic is the only path
They can dare to choose; but why do you

Who wish to see us fall, invade this house?

GRIFFITH: It is not forbidden to me to hear that word,
You say will swing the victory to your side.
Did not experience grisly on my head,
Prove that men are fools whom lightest straws control,
I would laugh to think the hope of Heaven could divert
Myriads who otherwise would sell their souls,
For an invitation to dine with a money prince;
And risk eternal Tartarus to wear
A diamond at their throat, and silken hose.

FABER: You blaspheme and desecrate this sainted house,
By even breathing that men could be so low,
They would an instant weigh in scales of gold,
The jewel that refracts the light of Heaven,
Against a vulgar mass of teeming earth,
The riches of the spirit glorified,
Against the plethora of foul desire.

(Enter Ruric.)

RURIC: Faber, I have the bishop's word for you,—
His message of authority to cheer
Your clans. Spread it fast among the men,
So that by to-morrow morn they have no choice,
But that this holy, inspired soul commands.

GRIFFITH: I demand the right to see your aged priest,—
To confront him in his learned, magic cell,

And wrest the reason of his potent sway.

RURIC: He sleeps,—I dare not break upon his rest,
That comes but fitfully to soothe his brain,
Aflame with efforts to control the world;
And hold men to the rocky steep of right.
To-morrow night you shall penetrate his cell,
Enter and touch his august hand;
To-day I bar the door at dagger's point.

FABER: I rush as if magnetic streams divine,
Like Mercury imprisoned, were in my hand,
And I were charged to set it free in drops,
To touch my sodden men to life and light.
Farewell, to-morrow's victory is ours.

(Exit Faber.)

GRIFFITH: Rash confidence of a blind enthusiast,
To-morrow is not upon us yet,—we'll see
Who wins! I go to scatter gold like rain!

RURIC: Then go,—to-morrow night you meet my pope!
(Exit Griffith, Archibald falls on his knees.)

RURIC: Great God, be with me in this thing I dare!
For Thee I lied and shut my sacred dead
Within his room, defying laws of health!
I pray Thee consecrate this ruse sublime,
And turn their hearts to Faber's cause and mine!

CURTAIN.

Scene 3. (Same library. The next night. Ruric discovered alone.)

RURIC: If I lived a thousand years of pain,
Could I ever feel sensation so acute
As this suspense that grinds my heart in twain!
The red light flashing from the signal tower,
And I have won in spite of death and sin;—
The yellow, and the devil swoops our state;
And all my chrystal days will turn to night,
A night in which the stars are hid by fog,
And the silver moon, disdaining our black face,
Retreats behind a pile of stormy clouds,
To smile perhaps on other worlds less base.
Do I dream with delirium in my mind and eye,
Or is that light the red for Faber's goal?

(He bursts into tears, lies reclining against the window for
some moments weeping and wringing his hands. Enter
Faber. He rushes to Ruric and embraces him.)

FABER: The bishop's message was strong enough to rouse
The dead from centuries of slothful sleep.
They leapt as if Messiah born again,
Had come to turn them to the light. I won
By something like ten thousand votes.

(Enter Griffith.)

GRIFFITH: And now you conquerors bold of face and stroke,
I want to see this sage who fights with fire,

And turns hell's minions from their love of gold.
I bow to such a victor unknown before
In all the Stygian paths of election days.
He cannot sleep in the face of such a goal;
Open the door!

(He pushes open the door, then starts back.)

What horrid stench is this?

As if rotting corpse where harbored here.

RURIC: I could not consign him to his grave before
Election day.

FABER: You cannot mean to say
That one is dead within?

RURIC: Braintree died
Two weeks ago, my every effort vain
To hold his ebbing life for one more tilt
With rapacity's infernal strength.

FABER: Then you
It was who wrote the message that saved the day!

RURIC: I risked an awful lie to win for you
The victory I know the bishop most desired.

GRIFFITH: You won your righteous cause by cheating lies!
Then after all, we are much the same, my friend:
And evil triumphs with your bishop dead.

RURIC: You juggle with your fancied gain o'er me:
For Faber, who rules, has never worked in crime,—
And I, who did the deed, am half convinced
There is no death. I think the bishop still
His mighty spirit o'er me lays, the words
I wrote, more truly his than mine.

GRIFFITH: Avaunt!
Such sophistry does not deceive a knave;—
You stole my votes by an ugly trick, and now
I will tell the men how they have been deceived.—

RURIC: You take your oath of allegiance to our side,
Or perish where you stand!

GRIFFITH: You threaten then!

(They advance to each other and scuffle with angry menace,
their hands at each other's throats. Faber attempts to
interfere, only to find them locked in a more deadly
embrace. Finally they fall together mortally
wounded and bleeding.)

FABER: My friends, desist, the very dead cry out
In shame.

RURIC: We have killed each other. I took the only course.
You now are free from your arch enemy,
And from the taint of shame they charged to me.
The bishop's heritage is yours. Farewell!

The Hills of Ennui

A Tragedy in one Act

Characters:

JACK RUNYON; ELISE RUNYON, his wife;

DR. CONTI BORAGNI;

MRS. DONNER CLASHING, the black woman.

(Scene: A modern apartment house in a large city. Library beautifully furnished with books, brica-brac, etc. Heavily drawn curtains. A low fire. Jack Runyon alone, leaning back in an easy chair, reading, and at times taking up a beautiful portrait of his wife.)

JACK: What makes me love her with such shameless pain?
They say there are men who never love at all,
To whom a woman is no more than food,
Eaten carelessly, forgotten soon;
A wine they drink to keep their spirits gay,
One day the vintage of France, the next from the Rhine.
The faces pass like April cloud-forms fleet,
The consolation of their flitting life
Remaining in their number infinite.

In a world half water no one dies of thirst;
In a world half women, no man should die of love.
This fickle sweetness trembles not for me,
Poor wretch of doom, in whom one fatal love
Bites and gnaws through every nerve of life.
I crowned her with my wealth, my heart, my all
And led her to the sacred altar rail,
With all the awe a heathen gives his God.
I gave myself a vassal at her feet,
Repelling every other wish that burned,
Forsaking kindred, friends, a patriot's fame,
But these were not enough to fill her want,
My God ! Has the demon greed possessed her soul,
That love and money cannot fill the void?
Or is it that I am so inadequate
I cannot bring her fitful heart to rest?
Oh ! I am poor, poor, a beggar poor,
My wealth desolves like broken, molten glass.
From envy I could almost kill the fool
Who drives my haughty carriage through the park,
For he holds his wife fast locked against his breast,
And sees his image in her lovely child.
Elise so shudders at a baby's smile,
You would think the little human thing a snake.
She finds it vulgar, common to be fond,
Although she is so ill, so wistful, pale.

The warm, red blood of passion in her veins,
Might scatter all this dull fatigue of pain,
If I could make her shriek for love of me,
I should feel myself an emperor born again.
To love and never to arouse a love,—
This fixed madness in my heart, at last
Will break its valves.

(Enter Elise.)

Elise, my love!

ELISE: To-day, I have laughed as I have never laughed before.
The vaudeville was all superb, a feast.
I am learning how to fence, such charming sport.
Some day, the doctor says, I shall be deft
At chess. They all were mad about my gown.

JACK: You look well, oh very well,— your color glows
As it never glowed for me.

ELISE: You like me sad,
Half-dead with our aimless, stupid life of ease.
You do not want to see me gay, amused:
This is your boasted, faithful husband's love!

JACK: You wonder that my heart feels just a wince,
To see you blush so sweetly, far from home?

ELISE: To see me blush? What is a blush but health?
You hire a doctor, pray to have me well,

And then complain when you see a cure complete !

JACK: Dear heart, I must be glad if you are glad.
If you had only won your joy from me.
You see that I grow pale as you grow well.
Our places change,—I pine and wilt and droop,
While you are blooming fairer than the rose.

ELISE: A kiss and you will be quite well again !

(Kisses him.)

All your ill thus easily dispersed,—
But mine a complicated thing of nerves,
And theatres, games and fol-da-rol.

(Kisses him again playfully.)

A man so silly, longing for a kiss.

JACK: Oh, Elise, Elise, you hurt me, hurt me so !

(There is a knock at the door. Elise answers it and admits
Mrs. Donner Clashing.)

DONNER: I heard from without that sibyllant, luscious sound
We mortals call a kiss. Who did the deed ?

ELISE: My Jack is so absurd,—he wants but that.

DONNER: From you to him, and who increased the dose ?

JACK: Your insinuation runs like turgid bile.
A caress between my wife and me includes
No helping warmth from any other source.

DONNER: Do not be too sure,—your doctor
Tenderly bends his handsome Italian head
Above Elise. He bears the name of one
To all our sex irresistible.

ELISE: Donner, I was ill; no other could assuage
A languor that I felt, the boredom dead.

DONNER: You never came to me. I raise my veil,—
I have a cupboard sweet with absinthe drops,
Distilled for those in ennui's grisly wood.
The robing of my mind is sable, jet,—
Yet beautiful as midnight's starry gauze.
If you were dull, you simply had to walk
With me. I probe the secrets of all deaths,
And have a few to my own count, you know.

JACK: How hideous, unnatural and how weird!

DONNER: No worse than you. Insipid, stale and dead,
As emptied dregs of beer drunk yesterday,
You cannot fill your vacant lives; and as
You rest with nothingness rolled out before,
The serpent coils; you drink no alcohol
But admit a doctor in your house to steal
Your wife from your too flabby arms.

JACK: Donner! My wife is mine! I am not tame!
You know I love her with a single love,—

This love a tree without a branch or leaf,
Just one strong root of being born in pain,
And living with one object always near,
Its star, its goal, its undivided hope.

DONNER: Monotony of love implies no art;
Your love for her is so exposed, intense,
You cannot hold her heart, much less her mind.
She flies from you, to see you call her back;
And knows, no matter how she whines and weeps,
And cries to be diverted and amused,
She cannot lose your pleading love or you.
A post fast fixed, imbedded in a rock,
You are a landscape ugliness to view,
While flowers and rivers laugh along the way.
Come now; take up the news; see who is dead.
Rent a house within a graveyard's reach,
Let Elise start at horrid things of hell,
And then she comes to you by natural paths;
For one who flies a field with carrion strewn,
Seeks hasty refuge with poor love outraged.

ELISE: You both talk nonsense, and plot, I think, with guile,
A little health, a little joy and mirth,
My husband sadly grudges his poor wife.
He is a miser in his selfish love,
Would keep me ill to please his jealous clutch.

(A knock at the door which Elise answers to admit
Dr. Conti Boragni.)

CONTI: Good friends, good day, my patient thrives I see.

JACK: She thrives enamored of your opera face!
What right have you to look like a Grecian god,
To carry about a face of perfect line,
Intruding itself upon a home of peace,
And breaking it as marble shatters Sevres?

CONTI: You called me to attend your wife, I came.
I sought her health and nothing more, and now,
Recalled from chilling shadows of the tomb,
She smiles and lives, you froth with jealous rage!

JACK: Because, by God! she lives for you, not me!
The rose that dies her cheek has come from you;
She is my wife in name, and yours in fact!

ELISE: You insult us both. The doctor never spoke
To me, except to tell me where to go,
What games to play, what joyous sports to choose.
Our married life was like a canvass stretched
In barren unrelief, before the brush
Of art has swept it into vivid life.

JACK: You betray yourself! We needed then
The hand of art, and this, your painter here,
Selected to throw his massive color in,

I could curse all things that masquerade as art,
A name you Latins use for love disguised!

DONNER: He errs as often as he breathes or speaks,
And fastens the blame upon those near to him.
I almost think that he were better dead:
Then Elise could choose her Grecian god at will.

ELISE: Oh do not speak such hideous thoughts out loud.

CONTI: I do not love my patient, and never did.
My thoughts are bent on science and its ends.

JACK: Like cravens caught in crime, you lie and lie.
And this black woman plots I think with you
To see me die. She admits her power to kill,
But I will not die to please her morbid thirst,
Or to gratify a guilty pair in love.
I loved my wife, oh God, I loved her so
I would have tramped the torrid zone for her;
But I was not enough,—too poor, too poor,
Inadequate! My love did not suffice. She was so dull,
I had to pay and pay to make her smile,—
And now she betrays me for a hired nurse!

(He dashes towards her and attempts to shake her while
he is almost in a convulsion himself.)

DONNER: You need a drop of absinthe, Runyon, dear.
(She pulls him away from Elise and clutches him as he clutched

her. He struggles for a moment, then falls back dead.)

CONTI: What have you done? The lunatic is dead!

DONNER: It tired me to see him raging so.

ELISE: You do not mean his life has gone from me?
He loved me so,—he was my husband, love.
Oh what have I done? what shall I do?

DONNER: It was your life or his; I played for you;
You promise more of interest in your love.
Complex, a thing of moods, caprice, you are
A dozen women wrapped in one, while he
Confessed he bore but one strained stem of life.

CONTI: Woman strange, the law will find you out.

DONNER: The law? That farce has never come my way.
I am justified in every burning creed;
I reason out my course and no one heeds.

CONTI: I like your bold, audacious front of crime;
Your steely eye, the lustre of your mind.
I ache from much fatigue of commonplace,
From little brains that count as far as ten.
My life is all for science, not for love,
As fools imagine from my face, a mold
That comes intact from centuries of art,
But only speaks to-day a modern need.

DONNER: You do not love her then?

CONTI: Why not so much

As the organ that soft sobs beneath my touch,
When Sunday's calm takes all my heart to church,
My passion is for work,—my joy the end
Achieved when all my efforts turn to bloom.
The gardener whose dahlias ape the rose,
The explorer extracting gold from barren sand,
The sculptor who sees his marble breathe with soul,
Has joys like mine, in science' long pursuit.
But I would not dare to sit in honor's chair,
If ever thought of love crept in between
A patient given to my skill and care,
And my own too tremulous heart.
(Elise who has been leaning over the corpse of her husband,
weeping and wailing gives forth a fearful shriek)

ELISE: False friend! I was then your tool, your instrument,
The subject of your cunning mind and skill,
No more. Oh Jack! my husband you are at last avenged.
The martyr of a wife indifferent, cold,—
Crushed and tortured in a bath of ice!
While I,—delusion of a petted butterfly,—
Thought to pique your pride with my own blush
That burned from an artist's touch of loveless charm!
Oh, I could kill myself with shame,—the truth

Is that I love this man of Olympic face;—
Conti Boragni, I love you like a slave,
See me now abased in naked sin;
Endowed with love and money like Croesus' hoard,
Yet so vain and selfish, weak and thin,
I pursued the fascination I could not have,
And killed the truest heart in all the world,
For just a bite of science' insolence!

DONNER: Do not blame yourself,—the deed was mine.
I told him he should win your heart by fear,
But he chose the ruinous path of joy.
A woman steeped in terror of the night,
Flies to rescue in her husband's arms.
A woman spoiled by sweetest vanity,
Forgets the truth for fickle freedom's run.
The woman in black is always heeded late.
He now is dead; doctor, would you learn
The secrets of my faultless logic scheme?

CONTI: I could almost love you for your daring plunge,
To speak of things that millions leave unsaid.
I go with you,—best call this woman's friends.

ELISE: Yes,—both betrayers, go, and leave me here
To mourn my dead.

(Exit Donner and Conti.)

ELISE: Oh, I could not dream that love would come
Like that,—my blood inflaming with sweet wine:
Old Italy incarnate in him lives,
Romance from some interred and hopeless past,
Deep stirred my pulses as Jack could never do.
I killed a man to win a beauteous doll.

(Opens the window and cries out loud.)

An officer of law is wanted here,—
A murderer gives herself to justice' care,
The corpse lies here, and in full shame confessed,
The woman whose folly wrought the killing sharp.

(There is a sound of disturbance in the street as if of a
crowd coming up the stairs to invade the apartment.)

ELISE: I wanted to be well; I was dull
And languid in a love that did not change.
The change has come; eunui has fled,
And fashion's pet is hastening to a cell,
The lowest thing imprisoned in remorse!

CURTAIN.

Souls of Derision

Characters:

GUSTAVE ERICKSON, a Carpenter; ANN HILLINGS, a Sewing Girl;

FANNY JARLING, an Actress;

GIOVANNI TORRI, a Millionaire Amateur Professor of Music.

Scene: The lecture hall of a modern socialistic club, furnished partly as a library, with a piano, writing table, bookshelves and rows of chairs. Time, the present. Sunday afternoon. Bright sunlight streaming in through the half-drawn green shutters.

(Gustave Erickson, a small, stoop-shouldered, red-headed man, with blinking green eyes and a stubbly beard, discovered alone in a contemplative attitude.)

GUSTAVE: I wonder if I dare look through the prism
Of Right and Duty, the film of shavings' curls
That fall in sawdust from my aching bench,
To gardens planted with the rose of hope?
Beset by beasts that egg me on to die,
My spirit leaps with maddened wish to live.
So poor, a paltry dollar looks a mint,

So threshed to death in labor's cruel mill,
I count my restless sleep the only peace
That life affords, my longings trodden down,
Like a battlefield by chargers trampled flat,
I should not turn a thought escaped, to joy.
But yet I will, defying death and fate;—
From out the cave of my stunted, withered soul,
I will plunge my being to a stealthy kiss,
And though I die the moment that the vine
Of passion wreathes its perfume to my lips,
I still can say I made one throw of chance
To be a creature like those other men
Who swing caressed in poppy dreams of sleep,
On the hither side of want and work and death,
They, born to beauty, hugged by sweet desire,
Inflamed with rapture from a birth too soft,
Have never known the chill despair I live.
But custom ever rolls in worn-out grooves,
The thing we know too well is rotten ripe;
And what we daily want, with nerves that throb
To touch the cup they cannot, must not drink,
Is precious as the nectar fresh distilled,
From crucibles where Olympians deign to mix
Their brew, I am intense with depth unknown
To mortals swimming in the fat and oil
Of ease, regardless of pain's mettle proof.

I pledge myself to act, whate'er the cost,—
And now she comes to prove my will a truth.

(Enter Ann Hillings, a sewing girl. She is small, thin and dark with feverish small brown eyes. She is dressed in a plainly clean white linen, and a straight, cheap, black straw hat. She appears embarrassed when she sees Gustave and goes to sit by herself in a distant corner.)

GUSTAVE: Miss Hillings, I cannot fathom why you fly
My path. Just come this way and talk of wealth,—

ANN: Of wealth? Oh not a subject so remote:
It is as strange to me as that far bourn
Where abide the dead in paradise.
I sometimes look upon the feathery clouds
That trail a snowy glory through the sky,
And wonder if behind their banks of light,
The angels dwell in rare beatitude;—
The rich to me are just as wondrous strange,
As beings in the Heavenly Heights can be.

GUSTAVE: Well, then, I will be brief and speak my mind.
I early came to seek you here to-day
That I might ask you to join your fate with mine,
To be my wife and share my workman's lot.
I boast of nothing but an honest mind,
And something beating strong within my breast,—

A wish you won't disdain to call a heart.

ANN: You frighten me,—I never dared to dream
That any life might lie in store for me,
But just the one that day by day I find
In pounding my machine for a bit of bread.
How could we live? For two are hard to feed
With only one to bring the money in.

GUSTAVE: I do not know, but something flutters here,
Within my thought and says a coward's part
Was never given us by a God all just.
He did not give us life to die each day
A death more cruel than a million tombs:
He gave us life to live, a place to win
In that sweet grove, celestial, perfumed, pale
Where soul meets soul, and ecstasy is born.
Let us dare to live, though daring cost
Next day a death 'neath money's brutal heels.
Give me your hand,—it burns with pain repressed.
Together we can cry and therein find
The hidden pulse of joy that dares to breathe.

ANN: If only once as in the story books,
You said you loved me, I think that I could try
To leap with you to any fate you choose.

GUSTAVE: A little man, unfavored by the gods,
I tremble to appear grotesque, absurd.

But if I dare defy my outward cloak,
And warmly, deeply say, I love my bride,
You can perhaps forget my handicap
And seek beneath, my soul that quivers, faint,
As a tired bird that after months of flight,
At last alights upon the orange-tree
Under a tropic sky, and fears to die
Before the honeyed fragrance of the bloom
Has wrought its magic in his opening heart.

ANN: You say you are not favored by the gods.
Well, what am I? Not strong or fair,—
Virtuous, yes, perhaps too much a slave
To that restless master known as work,
Work and duty bound to make a slave.
But the sweetness of your love runs through my veins
As elixir to the invalid of years.
Whatever pain there lies beyond this day,
I risk, and I am yours for love and life.

(They clasp hands and sit in silent communion for a few moments. Enter Fanny Jarling, a very beautiful actress, with large golden brown eyes, golden hair, and a peachy complexion. She is elaborately dressed in pink silk, with diamonds and other jewels, and an immense black picture hat.)

FANNY: What foolish waste of time,—there is no one here.

GUSTAVE: We three arrived before the schedule time,
The others follow soon.

FANNY: We three, you say?
You are the janitor and this the maid?
A servant does not count as any one.

GUSTAVE: Perhaps you wander here astray,—this place
Is sworn to socialistic change, we meet
On equal plane, though you are myriad rich
And we are poor.

FANNY: I was engaged to act.
Professor Torri asked a scene of love,
To entertain some friends, I know not whom.

GUSTAVE: Your mimicry then runs athwart the real,
My friend, Ann Hillings here and I just vowed
Our mutual love, before you entered in.

FANNY: You do not mean you two will kiss and wed?
Oh outrage on the soul of old romance,
How can you make the thought of love grotesque?
Distort the trembling myrtle bloom with snails,
And clog with mud the silvery fountain's play?
Intrude a gargoyle on a sculptor's dream
Of peerless marble carved in line of soul?
You set a hippopotamus to hear
The music written by the gods at dawn,

And retain the starlight's precious beams,
Transcendent, crystal in the purple night,
For use within a rookery of rats!

ANN: You think we should not marry because we lack
The loveliness that glows in your fair cheek?

FANNY: Oh, for myself, I weary much of love:
The infinite theme each day takes on a phase
I have never seen before. My roles just played
On Cupid's sweet and varied instrument,
Forever call for some new turn of mind,
Some untried chord of tenderness to touch.
To-day, a soldier breaks a lance for me,
And bends his handsome head to hear me sing;
While yesterday's exotic perfume rare
From a millionaire of fashion drunk with love,
Still weighs my eyelids down and tints my cheek;
Through bending branches laced of poplar trees,
On avenues with emerald moss soft-lined,
To-morrow's lord of love is calling me.

(Enter Prof. Torri, a millionaire, dilettante musician.

He has a handsome, Italian face, and the dreaming,
swimming eyes of a musician.)

TORRI: So early here, my beautiful queen of love,
And no one yet to feast upon your eye.
My star-sweet, you should never be alone,

To waste your beauty where there is none to see.
Each moment you should stand upon the stage
To feed a starving world that wallows low
In swamps of ugliness, to beauty strange.

GUSTAVE: Why even here, there is not the waste you think,—
My friend and I have drunk her beauty in.

TORRI: Oh, Erickson, I did not see you here,
And scarcely could believe you wooed by art
Or the more than art that lives in her.

FANNY: Just think, dear Torri, he gave me quite a shock !
It seems I chanced upon an interlude
Of love exchange between this maid and man.
It was the hour that their betrothal marked :
And if I had not quickly intervened,
The echo of their kiss upon the air,
Would have brought offence to the god of sound,

TORRI: Why man, you cannot mean that you would wed?
And wed this woman pale and small like you?
(Ann Bursts in tears.)

ANN: I cannot bear this deluge of their scorn,
While I am like a hunchback poor with pain.
But is it true I must not try to live,
Must shrink into my corner, starve and die,
Because God would not give me loveliness?

TORRI: It is enough that two are badly formed,
Without attempting to produce a third.
Why can't you see that you defile the earth,
If you perpetuate a weakling race?
And Erickson, you must be mad or drunk
To think to wed with your poor purse of pence!
You scarcely have enough for one and yet
You wish a bout with fate to starve or beg.
Why is not charity encumbered now
Enough with each of you upon our list
Of dependents working for their daily bread,
Without the thrusting of this marriage bond?

GUSTAVE: Something blazes hot within my breast,
And bids me say, for all my stunted height,
My narrow life, my ignorance, my want,
My unalluring face and untaught mind,
That you are less than I in justice' scale!
I do not find a beauty in your queen,—
For as, with unveiled eyes I see her now,
She is a hideous roll of greasy fat!
So pampered with a sensual flattery,
So enamored of her body's warmth,
She oozes slime at every pore of flesh.
While you, who do not touch the earth, but soar
On music's sweet, intoxicating strains,
To sensuous joy you squeeze for selfish use,

Are but a sot who reels for homè and ease,
With his can of beer concealed beneath his arm!
If you and she who swim in oil of self,
Can claim the right to live, then why not Ann
And I, who selfless toil to gain our bread
And do not ask from fate but just enough
To fight the griffin death, invading swift,
Where starvation once has placed his spiked, grim heels.

FANNY: We cannot stay to hear his putrid talk,
Why did you ask me to this low conclave?

TORRI: The state is menaced if no work is done
To appease the laboring multitudes at war
With wealth; I thought the sight of your bright face,
Would stop their howling for a week at least.
Instead, in envy's foul unworthiness,
The flame of Revolution grows in strength.
We'll leave this caitiff and his paramour,
And let them work their own destruction soon,
While we go forth to music's heavenly tryst.

(Exit Fanny and Torri.)

ANN: Oh, don't come near me or I burn to death,—
For me your lover's kiss pollution spells.
Reviled by ridicule, our love lies dead.
I would rather sink into my hovel depths,
And chew a bone a dog perhaps disdained,

Or beg a crust from some kind serving maid,
Than stand ashamed in derision's frightful glare,
So destitute of all God's gifts of charm,
My love is like a presumptuous shoot of weed,
Up sprouting amid the orchids of a king.
Leave me now to self-abasement's curse,
The loneliness of pity where none intrudes!

GUSTAVE: Are you so weak you cannot stand her fire?
Why, a soldier walks right towards the belching mouth
Of cannon pouring smoke and flame and shot,
And risks an anguish throw towards waiting hell,
Or Valhalla's hunting grounds of bliss;
And you succumb to a harlot's purple bloom,
And the florid talk of her lover drunk.
It is only beauty we so strangely lack,
The sculptor's form, the painter's color dream.
Oh God in Heaven, Thy creatures writhe in pain;
Just for one hour of glad triumphant life,
But give us beauteous form, the glow of health,
An imperial tread, instead of cringing mien,
A sparkling eye instead of death's dull glaze
On eyes that have grown old with fruitless tears!

ANN: Gustave! Do not blaspheme, we have no right
To pray for any special boon above
The little God has given us. At least

We need not add a sin to maim still more
Our lives so crippled, pinched and aching poor.

GUSTAVE: I will not add a sin; let's add a soul.
Let's try to think though knee-deep sunk in marsh,
That honest love not cheapened by desire,
Is beautiful as tendrils fine of fern
That unobserved grow from the gnarled oak roots;
Or the breaking of the sunset light
In silver pools of silence in the swamps.

ANN: We marry then to face a long ordeal
Of want that cuts our very bowels through,
And of ridicule that smarts and stings
Like whips with a million tails of pointed steel
That cut the soft, fine skin upon the cheek.

GUSTAVE: You shrink? You are afraid?

ANN: Dear heart, I will try!

(They stand clasped in a long, tender embrace.)

(Re-enter Fanny and Torri, with a number of frivolous merry-makers
who have assembled for the afternoon's performance.)

TORRI: My friends, the greatest joke of all for you,—
Two monkeys clasped in an amorous embrace.
An hour since they drove us from the hall,
Their disgusting folly nauseating us.
But to be driven out by a pair of fools

Was weakness akin to that a general shows
When he runs before a pest of gnats.
We remain for our afternoon of song,
While they go forth to any gulch they will.
Bold Erickson, you are not wanted here;
And furthermore, there will be no work for you
At your appointed trade. It is enough
That money lets you live alone, without
Your rushing towards a marriage with your kind.
Why Charity now runs to a fool's extreme,
When it grants the salary of family men
To impudent and ugly trash like you.

FANNY (to Ann): And you I might have deigned to hire
for a maid,
If you had kept your place beneath my skirt,
Must now rely on him you chose,
The inefficient arm that earns no bread!

(She bursts into a loud, derisive laugh, in which she is joined
by her friends who jeer and hiss the lovers who are still
standing with clasped hands and quivering breasts
withstanding the storm of derision.)

GUSTAVE: You have said enough, we are ready now to go,
To wander forth, like ancient Jews outcast,
Before a pitiless world that throws but stones,
Against our scarred and bleeding naked breasts.

Farewell, oh, you who could not use God's gift
Of beauty sent for everliving joy,
Except to torture those not so endowed;
But beware of vengeance dropping down
To strangle you just as you lie asleep
In drunken sloth. Some day perhaps you'll find
A loveliness in things that simply crawl
And shimmering wings upon the crooked clown.

ANN: Our sentence is starvation, simply death;—
But I have won a courage from this strain;
A noble love that dares to live in spite
Of agony, is worth the sacrifice,—
The flagellation on a martyr field
Against the ecstasy that elevates,
The sense of two in one without a hope.
We go!

TORRI: Enough of this shrill sentiment!
Begin the play!

(Torri sits at the piano and plays a cheerful waltz as Gustave
and Ann slowly make their exit, walking with heads
bowed and clasped hands.)

FANNY (aside): *Their* love is not a *Sham*!

CURTAIN.

My Soul in Ships

Though insubstantial, invisible, unknown,
My soul yet seems a stormy theatre vast,
Where in a sympathy occult, there moan
The spirits of a mighty audience, past
From earthly longings in a futile land,
To mighty passions unexpressed yet rife
With all the human heart has ever planned
Of love sublime transcending feeble life,—
Swift winging irresistible above dull strife.

In lonely caverns through the winter days,
I wondered, with an ache like earthquake shock,
How one could long for shimmering heart-warm rays,
And find but stubbornness like flinty rock.
Why then is given this yearning hope of love,
If never comes the answer to its plea?
Oh! are we tantalised by sprites above,
Who mock our dream that happiness can be?
But hark! A fearful sound comes booming from the sea.

Just as I hugged my lonely cold despair,
A ship that restless tossed upon the strand,
Shook and strained with all my pulse of care,
And in her iron frame by heroes manned,
In mother-love, my little soul possessed.
So when the unseen I that suffers, lives,
Pined in bitter ruth so uncaressed,
The great bark became at once a thousand sieves,
And sank beneath the sea, as love its being gives.

Another day a demon crossed my path,
Looming monstrous like dread Death in arms,
And hideous frothing with a vengeful wrath,
My being frenzied with myriad wild alarms.
The shrieking wind just clutched my tangled hair,
As running through a lonely blackened hedge,
I hurled myself into a hothouse rare,
Where orchids and bananas on the ledge
Of steaming lakes, sent warm perfume to kiss life's edge.

And in my blooming bower, I dreamed of heat,
As savior to menacing shapes that walk in black;
The tropic color flooding my retreat,
I laid upon my eyelids' fluttering rack.
The hyacinths and pale tube roses there,

Breathed forth an incense like an amorous swoon,
And quivering sweet upon the flowery air,
There came love-tendrils of a night in June.
Defying death, I gave myself to blaze of noon.

Repentance had no time to take its leap,
From ice to fire, and back again to ice,
Before I learned my lesson from the deep,
And heard that Neptune had cast again his dice.
A stately steamer equipped for battle's fray,
In northern seas, divined my cruel plight,
And in the dawnlight's searching, pearly ray,
Had given all her wealth to fire's might,
Burning like a holocaust to prove my soul was white.

Once again I dipped in sightless pain,
Into the realms where doubt its anchor lifts;
With yearning like a sick heart's funeral strain,
To move from finite bounds to immortal gifts,
To leave behind this fret of little heart,
And ceaseless wonder that men should be unkind:
To find a great white swan of the sea take part
In my immeasurable storm and ache of mind:—
Beyond the bar she drifted, free from ties that bind.

Oh love sublime, too deep for praise of men,
Oh throbbing sympathy of cosmic stage,
Thus to translate the sobs of my poor ken,
Into a regal language sweet and sage,—
Where no thought that aims to be divine,
No love that hopes to lift our feeble kind,
However buried in heart's mystery fine,
Is lost, but lives again where wild waves find
A mighty music in the wrecks to them consigned.

The Trident of Love

A Tragedy in 4 Scenes.

Characters:

SYRIA WATERFORD, a young Widow;

CONRAD DUNBOYNE, a Countryman;

RACHEL GIFFORD, Dunboyne's Wife;

SAUL RAVENHEARST, Syria's Defender;

PATRICK MORAY;

PERCIVAL MANNERS.

Scenes laid at Syria's summer cottage in the village of Dumwaring,

(Syria Waterford discovered alone on the veranda of her
summer cottage in the village of Dumwaring.

Time afternoon.)

SYRIA: How strange it is that once I yearned and raged
For solitude that seems so ghastly now!

I think that there is no such thing, but just
A word we frame to tease our fluttering hopes.
My ardent youth rebelling against the bars
Of the narrow cage my husband designed for me,
Beat with all a wild beast's furious pain
And longing to reach an untamed, outer space,
Absorbing winds and dew and perfumes sweet

Of untrod woods where tangles of the pine
And fir and bay in ecstatic union meet,
Their love expressed in wafted scent of health.
He would not let me go; each moment chained
By his ever watchful presence or his spies,
My every nerve seemed tied to a picket fence.
I strangled with the torture of one who cannot breathe,
And strained my eye towards sea and distant plain
As a ship-wrecked sailor parched on a desert isle.
And then when prayer had spent my utmost force
Of hot and thirsty days and sleepless nights,
He died; the clamp from my fettered life was raised.
As the last dull clod fell on his coffin lid,
I ran like a madman who unlocks his padded cell,
And flung myself towards the county road's free stretch.
I ran and ran till fatigue oppressed my limbs,
And I sank to sleep in a hidden bed of moss.
Then Heaven was kind and sent her cooling rain
To lave me in a slumberous, tender bath.
But that was six months past; there is no end
To anything we feel and dread and fear,
But just a dull continuance like a wheel
That turns and turns, forever onward urged
By some quick fiend of motion that never rests.
I am free and yet I am not free, for still
The very air seems charged with voices dead;

I start in anguish in the solitude
I once so madly craved.

(Enter Conrad Dunboyne.)

SYRIA (to Conrad): A friend! Most welcome!

CONRAD: Adored and ever-living star of love,
August with lights that tremor in the haze,
Serene as sheen of pearls in moonlight's glow,
Vibrant as a flame one cannot quench,
And beautiful as desire in love's young breast,
I kneel to you.

SYRIA: Your florid tongue offends.
Why this strange intemperance of speech?

CONRAD: It tells not half the tale of what I feel.
I do not mock or jest or flirt with you,
But speak from passion's own luxuriance.
You ask perhaps how comes it that I love
With intensity that seems to bear the force
Of full ten thousand men instead of one.
In childhood and the long dim days of youth,
I had no friends, but wandered o'er the hills
Of our remote farm-lands; the mighty woods
That crown the Sierras' far imperial heights
Were comrades of my daily thoughts; the lakes
Whose shadowed depths no diver ever pierced,

Now mirrored my dark imaginings, now gave
A wistful answer to my heart's unrest.
I lay all night beneath the giant oaks and dreamt
Of sweet new worlds that lay within the stars,
That through the branches lacing overhead
Seemed to prick my brain with yearnings vast.
The torrent of mighty Nature sweeping through
My being burned to focus on a heart
That humanly could understand my own.
I never met a woman to arrest my eye,
Until I chanced on you, and knew at last
My throbbing violence had found its home.

SYRIA: You speak indeed like torrents rushing down
A mountain's steep descent, no rocks between
Or gentle slopes to check their headlong course.
I cannot give you back in kind,—my mind
Is strange to fervors such as shake your own.
I have never loved; my youth was all consumed
In dry and futile hate; so thoroughly absorbed
In seeking to break a jail all lined with thorns,
So burning with a sense of wasted life,
My very nerves were dead to tender hope.
My eyes seemed blank with the thickened, darkened gaze
Of sight that had never quickened to a flower,
Or tasted ecstasies of subtle thrill,

In sculptor's magic line or painter's tone.
The love you name is strange to me as joy.

CONRAD: Why then my field is like an ice-pond clear:
Like me, you have never loved at all before:
Your depths unsounded search my own unrest.
My arms bear one great ache to hold you close:
The precious moments fly in un-lived life.
To-morrow be my wife in mingling love.

SYRIA: The pity is I cannot answer you.
I do not love you, and marry, I never will
Again without that inward mystery,
The little tender distant voice that
Calls to rapture of the dual life.
But still I like you: be my friend, no more,
And forgive an erring heart that cannot love,
Which has so died in lamenting long and vain,
It could not if it would beat like your own.

CONRAD: This mood of yours will pass; 'tis but a chill
Your widowhood has cast; it will go; it must,
For certain it is that I must have my desire.

SYRIA: I think your language threatens; it is too strong;
Where it is question of woman's will,
There is no such word as "must" Restrain your tongue.

CONRAD: I can't; this force within me blazes, lives

Like volcanic flames that burst their mountain beds,
And with swiftness incalculable enfold
Every living plant and crumbling rock
That lies within their furious onward path.
If fortresses high-placed on mountain tops
And armies of the holy and the cursed,
Should barricade my way to you, I still
Would find the means to clasp you to my breast.

SYRIA: I cannot listen to such torrid talk.
Leave me now and only come again
When you can speak with tempered, measured calm.

CONRAD: I leave, but you will call me back, I know.
(Exit Conrad.)

SYRIA (alone): Does life with fearful leer but jest at me,
Or is some madness inwrought in my brain?
Some sweetness unthinkable rests within the thought
Of love between two natures bent to one,
As of essences distilled from many herbs
And flowers through centuries of birth and growth
By subtle hands that knew some secret old
Of winning perfume from the seeded earth.
But it eludes my sense forever more,
And when I try to love, there comes instead,
A dull and cold repulsion hard as hate.
Is it that actual men insult my dream,

By travesty of the winged joy I crave?
Or am I just a hopeless, stupid thing,
For whom life holds no niche of dear content?
Will he come again with ardor all untamed,
To shock me with a contest with his strength,
Or shall I be again alone, oh, so alone,
So desolate with fear of shadow's might
Within my quivering brain? Oh, which is worse?

CURTAIN.

Scene 2. (Several months later. Syria seated alone on her veranda. Rachel Gifford passes and enters the gate of the house next door. Syria starts as she sees her.)

SYRIA: What miracle resides in resemblance of the face!
That woman might almost be myself, so like
Her skin, her pose, her walk, her very clothes.
My astral self projected in the haze
Of actual things without, which are per chance
The mirror of what our inmost thoughts decide!
So like me yet of grosser flesh and blush,
As if the color of my dreams of love,
Had dyed my cheek to warmer, scarlet hue.
Can it be an insubstantial dream,
The vapping of a sullen solitude,
As thin as incense smoke that filmy curls

Its upward way from altar height to height
In a dim cathedral's shy and still retreat,
Retorts upon its subtlety fine-spun,
By a material form so thickly human clay?
Who can she be? And why does she live next door?

(She turns to look intently at the cottage next door, and sees
Conrad Dunboyne. He salutes her and comes
up the path.)

CONRAD: You will not refuse to welcome back your friend,
Your nearest neighbor now who clings to you?

SYRIA: My nearest neighbor now? Where do you live?

CONRAD: This cottage at your right, a fence between
The symbol of the fancy you erect
To repel my love and remain yourself alone.

SYRIA (starting): I saw a woman enter there,—

CONRAD: My wife!

SYRIA: You married then! You married,—

CONRAD: My only love!

Since you to all my pleading proved so dense,
Since I could not clasp you as I would,
I vowed to win a joy almost as dear.
I sought with hope so futile it mocked itself,
Your image incorporate in another's frame,

Your face, but the usual woman's sex,
Compliant to the masterful hold of man.
The madness of my wish worked to its end,
And burned its feverish way through alien crowds,
Until I stood confronted with my goal;
Your silver eyes and raven hair I saw,
Your line of nose and curve of flushing cheek.
Oh, yes, she was all of you except your soul.
The warmth of my desire fast wooed her will;
We married and wondrous passion worked like fire,
For her life so linked to mine will soon bring forth
A child whose image I hope will be your own.

SYRIA: Oh Conrad, cease this hideous tale!

CONRAD: Not yet!

To make the nearness more complete I came
To live next door so that in touch with you,
My spirit ineffably wed to your high thought,
And my senses drunk with riches of her flesh,
I could within this sacred trinity,
Feel all convinced that I had married you,
In spite of your resistant will, the hate
You placed between my ardor and your heart.

(Syria rises, places her hands on her ear and cries out.)

SYRIA: You beast, you worse than beast, I loathe you now.
Can I borrow words from Dante's scenes of hell

To express my hatred of such a vicious deed!
Is any monster of the African wild
As gross as you, to insult me in this wise?
Leave me now at once and forever more.

CONRAD: For to-day, good-bye, but you can never break
My lock. I have married you and you alone,
You can no more escape my fond embrace
Than an uncertain mariner who attempts
An unknown coast, and but lives to know
The undercurrent with black encircling arms
Will suck him down to watery, strangling doom.
You know that if you leave this house and place,
I follow on although you seek the Pole.
For to-day, farewell.

(Exit Conrad.)

SYRIA: Am I a child of hell?
That my very innocence is cursed?
Must I live my remaining wretched days,
With this vile expression of a love,
Lascivious, repulsive to my every thought?
I must cast them from my mind, rear up a wall
To shut them out as if in truth they dwelt
On another hemisphere. I must forget,—
Suppose I were that woman he calls his wife?
Suppose that by some horrid alchemy,

She were my double self, that I indeed
Were slavish to his amorous kiss and hold,
The partner of his midnight joys and bed,
The blissful mother of his child to be?
Why suppose such strangely twisted guile?
Forget! I fear that sweetness is a myth.
Can any brain shut out its evil ghosts?
Oh who will rescue me from this dim mire?
I must go screeching forth for a knight to aid!

CURTAIN,

Scene 3. (Three months later. Syria's drawing-room. Conversing
with her are Patrick Moray and Percival Manners.
Saul Ravenherst enters later.)

PERCIVAL: Dear lady, the problem you propose is old;
I would rather on my word be in a cage
With savages and roaring circus beasts,
Than forced to fight a creature of the fields,
So coarse from absorption of our mother earth,
So saturated with its nether coal,
Begrimed like Vulcan in Aetna's mighty forge,
He flings his inky substance wild and wide
Even to the verge of a home like this.

SYRIA: You cannot help me then! Think how I burn
With shame and fury impotent and vain,
When he thrusts his infant in my face, and claims
For all my solitude, and chaste, sad prayer,
That I am its mother, the one who bore the child,
Being just an unreal photograph of me?

PERCIVAL: At the first repartee I should be dead.

MORAY: I cannot see why you should think of him
At all. You would tread upon a thing that crawled
Into your hearth, a cockroach or a toad;
You would not hesitate to shoot a thief,
And yet you must have outside aid to cast
This leper from the temple of your thoughts!

SYRIA: I cannot fathom why I asked your aid,
Since you are so dull in sympathy.
It then has never come to you to fear
The insubstantial winding of your thought,
The shapes that lurk within its spiral cells,
The fantasies association works,
As a simple phrase of a master's melody,
Becomes a fugue of harmony enwrapped,
So many times its theme is infinite?
If neither will help me with this looming pain,
Leave me then to fight it all alone.

PERCIVAL and PATRICK together: We are so sorry, — we do
not understand!

(Exit both.)

SYRIA: I have humbled myself to a pair of selfish fools,
Blank fools to whom the sophist always seems
A madman or a criminal at large.
It would have been so much the easier part,
To marry my monster from the luxuriant fields
Of Nature sprawling her creative zest,
Than to suffer from this triple life,
His child and hers, so strangely mine also.
Oh Love what art thou in the dreaming brain,
That thou dost blast our every living hope,
Superposing on our daily need
An effulgent form that ruthlessly destroys
The imperfect, checkered fact before our eye?
I could not marry him; no consent would come.

(Enter Saul Ravenhearst.)

SYRIA: Good day, I am glad you came, although it seems,
My friendships drift like sea-sands on the main,
Engulfed within the tide of the nameless vast.
I wish to love them, but enough of that.
You know I asked a service from some friend?

SAUL: I have come to tell you I worked your will.
Come, lower your shades and close the doors.

Speak soft, for desperate deeds should have no tongue.

SYRIA: Desperate deeds you say?

SAUL: I killed the child.

SYRIA: What madness do you speak?

SAUL: I have made you free.

This child was a living insult to your truth.

As long as it breathed, it cast a crimson stain

Upon the faultless sheen of your pure life.

It slumbered in its carriage,—the nurse away,

I quickly dropped a poison on its lips,

And saw its breathing cease. He will never dare

To outrage your noble friendship after this.

SYRIA: The crime will shriek,—they must be aware by now.

SAUL: Hush! They will never know, and I have proved

I loved you best; for claiming from your hand,

No gift of love or surrender of your sex,

I, the lone chemist, eccentric, weird,

Was not so base I refused to hear your call;

I cared not what I did so you were free.

Good-bye, I had best not stay too near their house.

(Exit Saul.)

SYRIA: At last have I found the selfless love I dreamed,

And found it swimming in a pool of ink,

So deep I could sink, forever sink,
And never reach the bottom of its pitch?

CURTAIN.

Scene 4. (A week later. Syria alone in her darkened room. Very dim lights. Incense burning; crowded with pictures, rugs, etc. Enter Dunboyne, looking wild-eyed. Hair flying,—shirt open; general disarray.)

CONRAD: Oh, why do you wish to see me so distraught, quite
mad?

You have plunged us all in a swirling pool of blood,—
Have turned my beauteous dream of love and life
Into the shambles of a butcher's stall!
The baby died, and Rachel with her breasts
All dry, no little lips to ease their pain,
Beat her frenzied head against the wall,
Then delirious with the love of death,
Stole a sharpened razor in the night,
And cut her throat. The blame is all on you.
So strange you could not feel my devouring love,
You could not see the necessity that drove
And burned through every nerve compelling me
To hold you in my arms, or think I did,
In some sweet semblance of the face I knew.
Denied, what could there be but ruin's sway?

SYRIA: You say that Rachel is dead, then I am dead!
For in spite of resistance night and day,
Resistance that took my strength and left me wan,
My soul like mold that grips the plastic clay,
Had fastened on her life, and for all denial
That I made to you or to myself,
Like a creeping sickness in my veins there ran
The truth, that she and I were really one,
That your love's compulsion had won my whim
And conquered my nauseous distaste of your bold front;
That I was in truth your wife, the mother of your child.
(Conrad rushing towards her.)

CONRAD: My wife! My life! My only love!
What is clay that crumbles 'neath our feet,
And melts like grease on broiling sands,
What in all the screaming universe
Is anything beside our love complete?

SYRIA: Do not tempt me lest I reel to you.
Think of your wife so newly dead,—your babe!
(Enter Saul Ravenhearst.)

SAUL: The police are on my track,—they scent the deed;
There is nothing hidden in the earth or sky,
And it is known that I have killed a child.
Syria Waterford, the thought was yours.
I had to serve you even unto crime,

I had to rid you of the thing you loathed,

CONRAD: You then killed my child?

SAUL: The others seemed

So cowardly, so foolish, disloyal, faint,
When she begged to be freed of the nightmare of your love,
I vowed whatever happened, I would not be
Like them; I would remove the hated word;—
But life is life; and murderers pay their price.
I killed a tiny bit of noxious weed,
To save a soul all lit like Heaven's stars;
But was it you or I or both of us?

CONRAD: Or just myself with you as facile tool?
My brain is clogged with deepening mystery,
Like matted blood-clots thick with cobweb dust
A frightened thief has used to stanch a wound.
My own identity has slipped to death,
In the warm, sweet, eddying gulf of yearning love;
I lost my vision and all my sense of right,
And felt that though my crooked path wound down
The steep defiles of crime, I could not choose
But follow on. Your deed for me has not
One throb of horror so it brings me close
To the being who stands for me in place of sun.

SAUL: The law heeds not such talk and I must go
To die perhaps for delivering you to bliss.

SYRIA: Can you think that life holds any bliss for me!

SAUL: Just this,—I loved you without passion's red,
But with the self-abandonement and might
Of a sickly soul that, famished, craves to live,
And rests its sole excuse on sacrifice.
If more there were to do, I would do it now,
And go to gallows or a jail's confine.
Good-bye, and love me when your thoughts are sad.

(Exit Saul.)

CONRAD: Now sweep this frenzied fool from out our lives:
Let me clasp you once and forget all else.

(He takes her to his breast, she submitting languidly.

After a moment she raises her face to his in
submissive anguish.)

SYRIA: There is no other end to what is passed;
I must be yours; your art has bought my life,
So poisoning it with lurid memories,
It cannot survive except in straining tense
To expiate their stain; so I must live
With you until the end, while to my mind
There ever present stands the bloody corpse
Of that other self of mine you married first,
And our little child so foully killed.

CONRAD: And I must ever live with thought that Saul
Will claim he loved you best, oh, more than I

Who know no thought that is not wrapped in you?

SYRIA: What is it that so stands between our clasp?
Is it my my mad dream of Elysian love unknown?
Or your intemperate youth with Nature drunk?

CONRAD: Or fate that like a death's head mocks and smiles
At this poor thumping human thing, my heart?

SYRIA: How dark the future looms, her shrill ghosts shriek
With revengeful venom, of the things they know.

CONRAD: And this is gratified love, that dear delight
The poets sing as earth's consummate peak!

SYRIA: Oh no, this is simply death prolonged!

CURTAIN.

Absent and Faithless

(A young woman is discovered sitting alone in the twilight at an open window, looking at a silver lake bordered with dark trees. She speaks in monologue.)

I wonder why they think it half a crime,
To love one's solitude intense and still?
Base language is a grossness of the flesh,
Compared to fleecy gossamer of thought.
The fine, soft essence of the creative mind
Is the bloom that rests upon the opening rose,
When first its tightened bud unfurls its leaves
And turns its virgin damask to the air.
The outer world, its death, too soon descends
To roughen with the wind and dew its cheek.
And yet this solitude deep steeped in thought,
Transparent, yet weighted with a weight unseen,
Is not the vacancy a fool believes;—
For though I sit within a voiceless gloom,
My lover's heart is beating near my own.
Although beneath a torrid Indian sky
He toils to make an empire mightier yet,
His heart has never wandered from its home,
Its nest secure and sweet within my breast.
Why love that lives in clasp of hand and lips,

Is feeble compared with a vibrant strength like this,
That piercing through ten thousand arid miles
Of senseless air and intervening life,
Yet throws its conquering aegis o'er my soul,
And wraps me round with perfumed incense leaves
From love's exotic hyacinths on fire.
How still and cold the silver depth of lake,
As if some gripping giant hand beneath,
Were freezing the crystal surface to itself,
Combating the sun's last purple, orange rays;
I seem to see strange ghosts of tiny build
That skim the water's whiteness, then disappear
Within the black unknown of bordering wood.
But why do I look upon the world without,—
When inward vision has such entrancement's swing?
In India, it is day, hot blazing day;
A moment resting from the killing sun,
He stands within his tent, remembering me.
The longing to clasp me to his breast is pain
So exquisite, intense and smarting strong
It runs to ecstasy in ravings' sleep.
And this I know is Heaven or all of Heaven,
A blind and staggering mortal dares to know;—
The perfect union of two souls that kiss
Through quivering ether waves the distance holds,
The music in their hearts a harmony sublime

Of angels whose instruments are stars and suns.
I feel so cold; the night comes down with frost,
I seem to perish on an Arctic strand,
Proud India's golden day receding now
From a fancy grown too weak too hold the clue
Of things the immediate senses do not feel.
What sinking dread has come upon my heart?
As if its ruddy blood had lost its power
To pulse in thrilling waves the organ through.
It is as if I lived on love alone,
No meaning breathing in the human void,
Without that mystery so sweet, divine,
And all at once I felt that it had gone.
The thick, black tangle of the lower world
Where Persephone wilts before the black-faced god,
The desert where no mirage is ever born,
The abandoned cave of the Egyptian pariah
Whose days are spent in caring for the dead:
The hungry silence of monastic solitude
In sad retreats unknown to gods and men,
The staring, garish walls where the mad are held,
Or the narrow confines of a prison cell,
Where ghastly wretches hug their wan remorse,
And suffocate in unavailing rage,—
Are but the antechambers of a life
That knows not love. Oh, why do I feel this drop,

The headman's icy steel upon my neck?

(She shrieks and starts up.)

What word is that which hits the very air,
And seems to charge with electric volts aflame,
The murmuring shadowed trees and pallid lake?
Why there it is in mammoth print jet-black,
It is Death, whose midnight chargers fast advance
With the chariot of the king of sin!

He has come to take me to my lover's tent:—

A minute and an eternity are one,

In this swift flight we make from twilight north
To tropic noon half-way across a world.

My sweet heart writes,—the letter is for me:—

(She reads.)

“I could not love a woman far away,

Or hold your precious image in my thought.

My famished senses craved their meat: I fell.

I am lower than the basest thing you dream,

A sot who grovels in his drunken mire.

I say farewell. Remove the blot I made

Upon your life transcendent, pure and rapt

About with heavenly clouds I could not reach.”

(She continues her monologue.)

His eyes are glazed with drink and drugs and shame:

His pistol lies within his delirium's reach.

A sound? A shot? My God, my dream has died!

I am alone in this wilderness of ache,
The love-in-absence which my being wrought
To that ethereal rapture of the soul
Whose sympathy is our sole hope of Heaven,
Was spun from tendrils of my mind alone.
And he I thought so true, was faithless, false
And did not even try to clasp my love.
It cannot be! I dream! Around the air
Is still with evening's balmy sense of rest,—
An hour more and the glory of the moon
Will throw its transforming light across the lake,
And I shall sink to rest with thoughts of him,
The slumber of the summer night just tinged
With the pale and restive flame of passion thrill
That beats athwart the pain of absent hearts.
Ah no! To-night I shall not sleep at all.
Some one has tied the fluttering silver wings
Of my imagination's enchanting flight
To things desired by a lofty hope
Of rarer joys than mortal yet has spanned.
The truth has burned into my conscious brain.
He never loved me, and now he is stark dead,
Gone to the last resource a coward seeks.
Oh angels sweet, remember me,—I need
Your care, in solitude without a hope!

The Broken Spell

Oh can it be that once with throbbing heart,
I loved you, loved as flowers bursting up
From Winter's bed of earth, at Spring's warm dart
Of life like nectar in a diamond cup?

Was it I who clasped your hands and kissed your brow,
Ecstatic in surrender of vain self,
This same I, that, cast in marble now,
As stony as a statue, views love's elf?

How could a heart by agony once tuned,
With vibrations languorous and divine,
Become so callous to its fatal wound
Of your fingers' touch upon its strings of vine?

Oh never, fairy, cast again this spell
Of enchantment making every sense a dream,
Of what has never been in earth or hell,
But only in the far-off starlight's beam!

An instant to transcend this dizzy vale,
But means a fall through quivering depths of daze,
To disenchantment's grisly wood, where rail
Lost famished souls who on their ruin gaze.

Your eye that once to me was eloquent
With pleadings of a love that could not be still,
Now seems the dusty glass of a puppet lent
An invalid who totters on death's sill.

Were every day since last we met a life,
Each fraught with passions of aspiring youth,
And burnt to ashes in the end of strife,
We could not stand apart in greater ruth.

Oh why has time like fire scorched my brain,
And turned my nerves to hard resisting steel,
So that like warrior mettle they stand the strain
Of enemies advancing swift,—and your appeal?

If I stood on Himalaya's topmost peak,
Holding in Parian marble Apollo's head,
And frightened at my height, with madman's shriek,
Should cast it down, it would be like this,—you dead!

My memory like a horse the bridle hurts,
Resists the backward glance of crushing years,
While thought with ephemeral toys enamored flirts,
Unwilling again to see a face that sears.

Could I tear the armor from my flesh,
The cynic's coat of iron mail and chain,
And find again beneath the cold hard mesh,
The gush of life betrayed in a warm blood-stain?

Ah no! My burning eyes too clearly see,
It was not you I loved, not you at all,
But just the wrapping from some spirit free
To wander in your heart, my own to call.

And yet, I must love or die like shameful clay:
Oh flitting loveliness of dreams the spell,
Just throw your magic net once more and stay,
Of the fulfilled hope of wistful love to tell!

Disguise

He stood amid his heaps of yellow gold,
And saw their color turn to putrid slime,
Then glancing through his orchards' gorgeous wold,
He seemed to see the hideous haunts of crime.
"We nothing see but what the mind gives forth," he mused,
"But mine is old and gray, its hopes with acid fused.

"Some fools believe there is no God of truth,
To them, the grape is sweet without a sin:
Oh better to be their dupe in a narrow booth,
One fleeting little joy of earth to win,
Then to live like me on knees before the caressing sky,
But with no faith in man my hopes to fortify!"

"If once before I turn to God my face,
I could but see a woman's truth revealed,
In shining eyes, sweet, clear, with stainless grace;
But see a man the sword of honor wield,
And choose the steep descent of death, for others' gain,
I would raise myself triumphant over skeptic pain."

In solitude he bent his royal head,
And wept the bitter tears of love denied,
Cried, "I could love in realms where angels spread,
Their wings of diamond film white, rarefied,
Could love like sunbeams rushing towards a newer dawn,
If one would meet me there by equal love upborne."

The venom bit into his sterile breast,
So that he tore in rags his velvet robe,
And plunged in anguish forth to make the test
Of naked worth, some love unmasked to probe.
He tramped the squalid slums of beggary's last resort,
To give to leering, fawning wealth a sharp retort.

He sat in a factory's suffocating noise,
His cheek just grazed by a girl of humble birth,
And watched as if his soul were in the poise,
Between his hope and fear of her rare worth.
A moment he thought her base, and trembled craven, pale,
Then ecstatic saw her pure in ignorance' veil.

The aching months like trains of fire sped,
Across an ashy plain where none could live,
And madness seemed to make with him a bed,—
He would his very hope of Heaven give,
To prove that poverty's poor child could never lie,
Would, selfless, love his soul, transcending hearts that die!

Disguised in poverty's black garb unkempt,
He bent upon her all his famished soul,
And prayed that as no gold her greed could tempt,
Her heart with love-waves strong to him would roll,
His hand just touched her matted mass of auburn hair,
His question leapt to greet her eyes, then hovered there !

Then darkling with intelligence new-born,
The hazel depths repelled his yearning cry.
Suspicion keen as his the veil had torn:
"Could I love you? Oh no! You are a spy!"
She shrieked with peerless flame, "a vampire here to search
An unknown guile and all my harmless youth besmirch."

Then truth and truth, from falsehood now set free,
Met in a duel where one could but die,
With faith a corpse on blackened gallows tree,
The witness that our hearts but beat to sigh.
"I am a millionaire," he cried, "Who begs one bud
Of love too pure to bloom in money's treacherous mud."

"My heart," she said with trembling pride alert,
Will neither stoop to your droll masquerade,
Nor sink to salve your self-inflicted hurt.
It has gone to one obscure, of poorest grade,
Yet large enough to love without a doubt:
Your siege, oh bitter soul, has ended in a rout!"

Then livid hatred swept his outraged love.
He saw her pure with purity to rise
Untarnished from his own assault, above
His frenzied last appeal,—in love-truth wise.
He loathed her sweet transparent eyes, and rushed away
Where wealth in misery gropes for Heaven's sun-kissed day.

The Lees of Life

Were mine the artist's subtle brush
To paint in color tones my wandering thought,
The Nature tongue in flying rainbows wrought,
I would disdain the ardent blush
Of full-faced day that glaring hurts the eyes;
To reveal the grays beneath the cloudland sighs.

One day the somber troubled sky
Gave my fancy the lure of coming doom,
The fascination of a boding gloom;
While strong in purpose to defy
The coming storm, there lay beneath the vault
The silver sea as still as crystal salt.

And where the little tender waves
As softly as a fitting silence lapped
The crumbling earth so glad to be enwrapped,
The beach weeds sinking to their graves,
Now seemed as melancholy as blackened peat.
Now a scarlet runner like warm heart's beat.

A sense of beauty sharp as pain
Shot through this sadness of the outer day,
As if no poignancy one could betray,
Of love or tears or love-drunk stain,
Except upon the shadow's rim of pearl,
Or where the marshy growths their grass unfurl.

I turned my fevered being in,
To where our childish human walls enclose,
The petty human kind, the tiny foes
Of all proud nature writes of sin;
And lo! The little mirror told the tale
Of passion's lees, its tears without avail!

Their mercy I begged for ease;
And hurled myself upon their querulous life;
My streams of being with quicksilver rife,
Poured upon their ashes and lees.
And somehow there to love my heart awaked,
As if love's truth were found but when it ached.

God's poetry sublime, I mused
Is written then like this in blood and flame,
The water's marble stillness against the shame
Of swamps so low and self-accused,
They seek their own eclipse, in artful foil
To swan-birds white, and hearts that stooping, toil.

Oh ecstasy of magic day,
Whose myriad pains were kissed in twilight's fall,
When riven by the dying sun's fond call
The lowering steely clouds gave way
To golden airships afloat on purple mead,
And flying Nile green streams the ether freed!

And though I cast my love away
Where guilt and scarlet cower from the light,
And hide their littleness within the night;—
There was one victory in gray;
They learnt that wasted love can still aspire
To thrill like love divine, e'en from the mire.

Transition

In Memory of Dr. STEWART BOWENS, who died in
Dublin, Ireland, September 3rd, 1907

Released from battle's blinding smoke and glare,
A warrior maimed, with every nerve a scar,
I longed for streams of silver oil that bear
The broken rocks from mountain heights afar.

A velvet moss with Autumn leaves thick strewn
To bear my aching feet to silence' crypt,
I craved, and begged from torrid skies the boon
Of rain to feed pond-lilies dewy-lipped.

Then slowly from a desert he had known,
On my hot sands, a friend stretched forth his hand,
And looked at me through eyes wherein had grown
The seed of thought so great the world it spanned.

Just free from cannon's roar on bloody field,
I held my senses for the finest thread
To the thickened gaze of mortal sight revealed, —
The fairy wafer of a soul outspread.

Back from passion's lurid play of pain,
He lured me with a smile like balsam sweet,
And just to prove that still we both were sane,
His eyes gave forth a laugh my own to greet.

And then through dusky days of commonplace,
We took our torch of mind enkindling mind,—
Explorers striving the North Pole to trace,
We sought the psychic realms of air to find.

So dull Love's meaning to our baser side,
This subtle sympathy I scarcely knew
Was he, until I heard the ebbing tide
Of death had claimed my rare companion true.

Too feathery light he sat upon the earth,
So soon to be wafted from our human chain;—
Oh what was life at all in this drear dearth,
Of the only one who understood my pain?

I hated all the insolence of life,
The animals whose death could break no heart,
The children shouting in their lustful strife,
Now his fine film of love had gone from art.

Again I saw the fevered murk of flesh,
Where men rend men like wild beasts seeking prey,
And only memory held the radiant mesh
Of that rare friendship's ever tender play.

I mused how death's long bony claws of black,
Could touch the silver brilliance of his thought,
And all my being put upon the rack,
Of that transition dark in anguish wrought.

Ah! What music wooed my nerve of ear?
Ecstatic singing through the dawnlight's hush,
And winging all my fancies bruised to hear
The high sweet note of the early morning thrush.

He would not leave me long in pain alone,
But came consoling from his spirit mist,
To tell me never more to make a moan,
For souls like his that pass by angels kissed.

"It did not hurt," he said with his old caress,
"Do not weep for one the light enfolds;"
A moment looked at me with that old stress,
Of eyes that see, of mind that wisdom holds.

Though now I walk with blistered, nail-torn feet,
And look in eyes that cannot answer me,
The cobweb clings in memory's still retreat,—
"Death does not hurt," and, soaring, we are free.

The Sea Claims Its Own

When childhood's fancy played with senseless things,
She gathered seaweed for a hidden drawer,
To press within her diary's fragrant store
Of unlived thoughts, the chrysalis of wings;
The something secret, dear,
That innocence must rear,
To prove itself the arcana of sacred ore.

And why she loved it clinging, cold and wet,
With viscous fingers like tails of amorous snakes,
She did not know, nor why her silent aches,
Just trembled to the death of all their fret,
When sea-winds washed her cheek,
And in the ocean spray's salt reek,
She felt as pure and free as air snow-flakes.

Away from wanderings of a youth too wild,
With precious throbs along the ocean's edge,
She found herself caught in the inland hedge,
Where experience piles its years on hope beguiled.
And throttled with dry thirst,
Her pathway seemed accursed,
Her feet entangled in the human dredge.

One moment the pain of pains was to be loved
With love that burned through ruin's fetid mire,
The next she bore no agony more dire,
Than not to win a heart, to go ungloved,
With bare and bleeding hands,
And hair unheld by bands
Of caresses fine as silk, as warm as fire.

Oh living was such a sorry maddening strain,
Its every wish a stem of brittle glass,
Splintered in needle fragments against the brass
Of vulgar flesh untutored to refrain
From desire's torrid kiln!
Had aspiration's will
Burnt out its psychic lamp, like stars that pass?

The final note in the diapason loud
Of her wedding march on an organ strung with gold,
Had almost struck and all her future told
On paths with Babylonian gardens proud:
The hostage of the world,
Her quivering being hurled
Into the lava bed by vulcan controlled.

But hesitation held youth's perfume yet,
She dipped into those scented scenes of play,
Unclasp'd the book so sweet with delirium's sway

Of ideals like tears of God divinely wet.

The crumbling soft sea-weed,

Fulfilled her being's need,

And she breathed as one who saw again new day.

Then dreaming once more she stood upon the strand,

At dawn when pearling shadows creep to rest,

And blazing crimson purple heaves the breast

Of tremulous water rushing towards the sand

The rising sun has gilt.

No more her heart could wilt,

With fear of city's heat and merchant's test.

But not alone she stood to see the light advance,

And daze with silver ripples the receptive sea,

Her sailor lover, straight and strong and free,

With noble heart and truth in every glance,

Just clasped and held her there;

In the spray of dewy air,

His sapphire eyes turned seaward for their key.

Now deeper than any one could understand,

The peace that settled on her distraught heart,

In knowing that nevermore the world could part

Her spirit from that dawn's august command.

The sea has claimed its own,

She cried on dreamland's throne,

Her being thrilled with brine winds' compelling dart.

The Vibration

An Aeolian harp that waits with piteous droop
The caressing wind that sways its strings to life,
My being trembled faint, without the hoop
Of a nation's clasp of hands in buried strife.
My eyes surveyed the narrow round of home,
The empty streets, the sober men, the polls,
Yet in subtle straining, yearned to roam
The country's stretch, and see the pulsing souls
That turned from hatred to a union new
Of myriads who breathe with valor's single aim.
I could not see,—a grey veil hid the blue:
The democrat stood within his narrow frame:
A sound of portent worse than silence' dearth,
The muffled whisper of agony suppressed,
Just teased my ears, and robbed me of my mirth,
The hope that election day would be a rest.
Then o'er the ashes of the commonplace,
Athwart the millions striving for a right,
The giddy and the weak in mind's dread race,
The poor that kneel, the rich that die in might,
There came the wail of those who lost and fell,
Who perished strangled in a nation's spasm,

Like clay-banks washed away by ocean's spell,
Or melted gold beneath the river's chasm.
Oh if I stood with Dante on the verge
Of things too ghastly for the soul to view,
I could not suffer from a deeper surge
Of pain, than this which gave my heart the clue
To sorrows I never could have guessed or dreamed.
Vibrating through three thousand miles of air,
The cry enforced by every wave that streamed
Against the mountain heights in ether rare,
The misereere of a people's woe
Seemed strong enough to break my heart and ears.
On knees that ached, with eyes all dimmed with flow
Of fruitless hopes and unavailing tears,
They wept, "Dear God, but give us peace to-day,
But let us see just once before we die,
The face of joy, the love in Heaven's ray.
What have we done that thus we grope and sigh,
In blindness, darkness and the Stygian night,
While once in Greece the sunlight glittering played,
And men, like gods, were creation's first delight;
And once in Rome their thoughts an empire made?
Dear Lord, have mercy on Thy creature's pain;
Prostrate we kiss the earth, and see no sky,
Yet must we call this life!" The wild refrain
Beat on my pulses like a baton high

am.

The tragic angel wielded for his theme
Of music born from yearning dashed in shame,
From aspiration trailing starlight's gleam
Across a midnight marsh where griffins aim
Their deadly shafts, and fancies grow to shades
Of grisly hue and threatening hideous leer.
My nerves a violin whose strings in braids
Of twisted discord played the anthem "Fear",
In anguish throbbed with that great human cry.
I died in that vibration's piercing pain,
To live with pangs that forgetfulness defy.
That night I saw a nation born again.



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